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Papers on the

THEOLOGY OF MISSION

Essays on the Aim of Mission written by Methodist scholars
and discussed by theologians and mission executives at
Lake Forest, Illinois, June 29-July 2, 1965.

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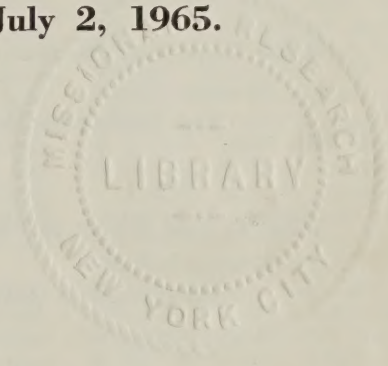
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PREFACE

Since the mid fifties the Division of World Missions has sponsored an annual Theological Consultation with the participation of professors from Methodist seminaries and members of the Division staff. Over the past decade this has been a significant opportunity to study a wide variety of theological issues related to the total mission of the church.

The new World Division decided to continue these consultations, and in late June, 1965, it sponsored a consultation on "The Aim of Mission." It was recognized that this topic concerned the entire Board of Missions, not only the World Division, so invitations were sent to members of the other divisions and the Joint Commission on Education and Cultivation. In addition, representatives of the Evangelical United Brethren Church were present.

The papers which follow were presented at this consultation. One wishes that the very lively and enlightening debate which followed each paper might be included also, but this is not possible. We trust that a careful reading of these papers will help the reader to understand better some of the complex and highly important issues implicit in any brief statement of an Aim of Mission.

EUGENE L. STOCKWELL

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GOD'S WORD AND THE AIM OF CHRISTIAN MISSION

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The invitation to do this paper requested that I not start from scratch on the Biblical teaching on mission, since this can be assumed, but make a critical survey of recent literature on this subject and then, on the basis of my own understanding of the Scriptures, formulate the central theses I might deem worthy of special emphasis.

That clarification seemed to exempt me from any obligation to try to illuminate the meaning of "God's Word." Since my confusion on this subject had recently been somewhat enlarged under the tutelage of Karl Barth's *God in Action*,¹ I breathed a sigh of relief. But my joy hardly survived a second thought. Not only did it soon become apparent that I would have to rethink the meaning of the first two words of my title before I could formulate the suggested theses. It likewise became clear that I could not begin to fulfill even the first half of my assignment without doing so. For how could I begin *critically* to survey the literature in the field without joining the authors of that literature in a dialogue about their understanding of the Word of God? I shall make no attempt to detail my contributions to this conversation in a series of definitive propositions. They will become apparent, I trust, in the course of my report of this encounter. But in the event they should not, all doubt as to their general direction will surely be removed by my concluding suggestions for further consideration.

A Survey of Recent Literature

The problem of organizing my examination of recent writings in the field could have been solved in a variety of ways. After dismissing the absurd possibilities of chronology and the alphabet, I considered two live alternatives before reaching a final decision as to how I should classify my findings.

I thought, first, of discussing them in relation to the four big

questions raised in "The Theology of Mission Among Protestants in the Twentieth Century," by Gerald H. Anderson: "(1) What is the Biblical meaning of 'the nations,' and the theological significance of 'the ends of the earth'? (2) What are the meaning and the practical implications of the Christian claim that there is salvation 'in no other name'? (3) What is the relation between history and 'salvation-history'? (4) What is the relation between the gospel and human cultures?"² Because of the obvious importance of these questions, I reluctantly abandoned this inviting plan only after it became apparent it would coerce some important books into holes for which their authors never intended them.

According to the other rejected alternative, I would have grouped the materials according to the stratum of Biblical literature—whether Yahwistic, Deutero-Isaianic, Pauline, or Johannine—receiving chief stress. When it became apparent, after a few depth soundings, that Ezra and Jesus or the Yahwist and John, depending on the special bias of the interpreter, might have more in common than, say, John and Paul, I gave up trying to derive appropriate categories of classification from the writers of the Book. Such a scheme could hardly have done justice to the stance and idiosyncrasies of the writers of the books.

After giving such leads more considerations than they deserved, I decided to classify the various writers³ according to what I regard as their typical posture in Biblical interpretation. These four classes may be characterized as the authoritarian, exemplary, the formal, the functional. I shall describe these approaches on the basis of their reflection in the writings of some of our more contemporary theologians and/or Biblical scholars. I shall then proceed to evaluate these approaches in terms of their relative viability in the

contemporary scene. Finally, having committed myself rather emphatically in favor of the functional approach, I shall advance some theses for further consideration in our pursuit of the aim of Christian mission.

The authoritarian approach grounds the validation of the missionary enterprise in Biblical commandments. While fundamentalists immediately come to mind in this connection, they do not by any means hold a monopoly on this tendency. It manifests itself, for example, in some of the contributions in the Anderson collection.⁴ The essay of Karl Barth is a surprising case in point.⁵ If our knowledge of his theory of missions hinged solely on this article, few of us, I suspect, would hesitate to place him in the authoritarian camp. He may be excused from susceptibility to this charge on the ground that he produced this exegesis of Matthew 28:16-20 under assignment. However extenuating this circumstance may be, and I am quite willing to make some allowance for it, it can hardly do plenary atonement for Barth's singleminded interpretation of this text as a virtual reporter's account of a real "space-and-time" event in the life of the resurrected Jesus⁶—I might add, in sovereign disregard of the testimony of important contemporary New Testament scholars to the contrary.⁷

Face to face with this obvious *tour de force* by a theologian who doubtless knows better than he does in this particular instance, I could only suspect the operation here of a powerful subconscious bias. As

⁴ But one must hasten to add, though, that hardly an essay in this entire volume fails to hint at some of the limitations that beset this approach.

⁵ It would be especially surprising for those, I believe, who know Barth better for his commentary on Romans than his voluminous work in systematic theology. At any rate, his essay in the Anderson symposium, "An Exegetical Study of Matthew 28:16-20," *The Theology of the Christian Mission*, pp. 55-71, seems to this writer to reflect a quite different stance from that which he came to associate with Barth's name on the basis of some of his other writings.

⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 56.

⁷ Cf., e.g., the view of Johannes Blauw, *The Missionary Nature of the Church*, trans. by W. L. Holladay and A. M. Chirgwin (New York: McGraw-Hill Co., Inc., 1962), pp. 124-125.

² *The Theology of the Christian Mission* (Gerald H. Anderson, ed.; New York: McGraw-Hill Co., Inc., 1961), p. 15.

³ Since my chief aim is to make suggestions about methodology, I shall make no effort to provide an exhaustive classification of writers.

¹ Trans. by E. G. Homrighausen and Karl J. Ernst (Manhasset, N.Y.: Round Table Press, 1938).

I continued to read between the lines of Barth's words, the shape of a quite definite presupposition began to emerge. He seemed unduly anxious to find a dominical directive in which he could root the theory and practice of Christian missions. While a less Christocentric theologian would have been content with the discovery of such a command anywhere in Scripture, it would be a mistake to make very much of this difference. Any variation it may entail in approach to the Bible pales into insignificance beside its agreement as to the nature of authority. For while scope and method of mission may differ, they still have their common sanction in the words of Scripture.

The justification of missions on the basis of this approach has had a long and influential history. One would be hard pressed to find a single defense of the missionary endeavor, at least between Pentecost and the Edinburgh Conference, whose author did not treat such passages of Scripture as the Great Commission as a sort of special lectionary for the church in mission. But the situation is rapidly changing. Despite Karl Barth's somewhat vacillating encouragement of this approach, its perpetuation has become both a hindrance and an embarrassment, many missionaries feel, in the spread of the gospel.⁸

A closely related but somewhat more flexible method is what I, for want of a better term, call the exemplary approach. It is marked by a freer, though still wooden and stultifying, attitude toward Scripture. It demands not proof texts but precedents. But while this precedent may come in the form of action rather than words and from a group—e.g., the church—rather than an individual, it confronts the reader with a demand for duplication rather than examination. The crucial issue for contemporary Christians is not the how but the fact of the establishment of the precedent. It's what has already been determined. Their obligation begins and ends with the decision as to whether or not

they shall cut the cloth of their life on the model given them in the Bible.

The pattern itself may have to do primarily with the time, the sphere or the goal of Christian missions. Cullman's essay in the Anderson volume⁹ illustrates the use of this model with respect to the time of the church's mission. Even while conceding that Paul mistakenly telescoped the end, he works manfully to make room for our performance of the sign of the end, namely the proclamation of the missionary message to all the nations, even though that end, according to Pauline calculation, should have taken place long before you and I ever arrived on the stage of human history. The really disturbing thing about this analysis is not Cullman's discovery of a means whereby he can find a place in Pauline chronology for our participation in the missionary task of the church. It is, rather, the subtle, though happily unvoiced, implication that, apart from such a discovery, we might be exempt from all missionary obligation.

Despite certain tendencies in the direction of a dynamic interpretation of the Old Testament as a missiological guide, as when he says, for example, that world evangelism consists chiefly of the presence of God among his people and the presence of his people in the world, Robert Martin-Achard finally errs toward the exemplary approach. Missionary work in the Old Testament is understood to be the work of the living God in the life of his obedient witnesses. "Mission has nothing in common," he assures us,¹⁰ "with any sort of political or commercial enterprise; it is entirely dependent on the hidden activity of God within his church. . . . And surely it is not in vain that the Old Testament reminds the church of this truth."¹¹ I do not call your

⁸ "Eschatology and Missions in the New Testament," trans. by Olive Wyon, pp. 42-54.

⁹ *A Light to the Nations*, trans. by J. P. Smith (Edinburgh: Oliver and Boyd, 1962), p. 79.

¹⁰ As John Deschner points out in "The Spirit of God and the Christian Witness," *The Christian Mission Today* (Joint Section of Education and Cultivation of the Board of Missions of The Methodist Church, ed.; New York: Abingdon Press, 1960), p. 60, theologically speaking, "this is a perversion because it suggests that God's activity is the enemy of human freedom, as if there were only so much freedom to be divided between God and man, and the more you emphasize God's activity the less you can emphasize man's. Nothing

attention here to what I regard as a *prima facie* misrepresentation of the Old Testament viewpoint, even though I am fully convinced that the prophets have a great deal more to say about the intervention of the Holy Spirit to transform Israelite politics and economics than to effect the salvation of the nations.¹² I call your attention, instead, to the unexamined assumption of the possibility of defining the task of the church on the basis of Israelite history.

A Finnish pastor, Gustav Kvist, employs this method in his book, *No Other Name: Missions in the Light of the Bible*,¹³ to argue for a restricted view of the missionary task. Just as God protected his heritage from immature syncretism by entry into an exclusive covenant with Israel, he safeguards it in the Christian era by replacing the old Israel with the new Israel. Instead of all the nations falling heir to Israel's place, that place is taken, instead, by the church, the people of God, who are gathered from all the nations. "It is this gathering into the fold of the one Church, not the transforming of corporate nations into Churches, which is the real task of missions. In obedience to the ascended Lord they can be conducted only by the church itself. So the whole study logically leads to the last chapter 'Extra ecclesiam . . .'. This declaration of Cyprian," as seen by Kvist, ". . . is not the expression of a self-satisfied desire to gain clerical power. It is . . . submission to the sovereignty of God, who offers His grace to mankind in the way of salvation which He . . . ordained."¹⁴ Kvist's view of

could be more contrary to the gospel of Jesus Christ. The Christian knows that the more he lets God have his way with him, the more man is liberated from bondage to self and sin, and the more he is freed to forgive, love, and serve his neighbor. God wants men to be free! God's activity does not paralyze a man; it liberates man; it activates him, and makes him a fellow worker with God. In the light of the gospel (and the Old Testament!), the more we emphasize God's activity, the more we may properly speak of human freedom. For us that means: the more we recognize that the church's mission is God's activity, the more we may properly speak of it as our activity."

¹² See, e.g., the brilliant work on the prophets as critics of international relations by Norman K. Gottwald, *All the Kingdoms* (New York: Harper and Row, 1964), who simply explodes the Docetizing tendencies of Martin-Achard's interpretation of Israelite religion.

¹³ This book, published in the Finnish language, was accessible to me only in the summary of it that appeared in the review by Peter Beyerhaus, *The International Review of Missions* (1958), pp. 333-336.

¹⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 335

⁸ Lesslie Newbigin, *A Faith for This One World?* (London: SCM Press, Ltd., 1961), p. 76, without expressly tracing the problem to its source in bad hermeneutics, laments the fact that "the prosecution of the Christian World mission has been and still is shot through with legalism."

the Bible differs from that of both Cullmann and Martin-Achard in one important respect. It is much more sweeping in its treatment, bridging the gap, as it does, between the Testaments. But if anything, it exaggerates the errors in their approach. By implication, if not otherwise, it impugns the Christian character of any church order or missionary activity without Biblical precedent.

The formal approach, as distinguished from the exemplary, is characterized by a narrower focus. Instead of calling for a wide-ranging duplication of Biblical precedents, it extrapolates from the New Testament some particular form or element deemed to be of crucial significance for the spread and practice of Christian faith and turns it into a test of faithful witness. Pleaders of numerous special causes, from capitalism to pacifism, have employed this method and could, therefore, be cited in illustration of its central tendency. But recent New Testament theology itself, as John J. Vincent contends, presents us with a more pertinent case in point in its reiterated stress on the rediscovery of the *kerygma*. Vincent gives us the following severe assessment of the present state of this development:

Even were the *kerygma* idea a wholly watertight theological position in terms of the New Testament evidence, . . . its influence in the field of theology has not been entirely . . . good. . . . It has confirmed our present predisposition to regard correct doctrine as more important than correct behavior. It has led us to believe again that, provided our 'message' was right, all other things would be granted unto us. It has not led to political and social involvement. In the hands of the Bultmann followers, it has become the 'essential element' in the New Testament, that which remains when the 'myth' has been excluded. In the mouths of the existentialists, it has constituted that 'truth' to which response was to be made. In a word, it has taken the place of Christ and discipleship. It has become itself the new 'myth' which needs to be demythologized.¹⁵

Karl Barth, in his estimate of verbal testimony, gives us an even sharper illustration of the demand for the perpetuation of a particular

form, namely the sermon, as the norm of faithful Christian witness. "God communicates with men also by deeds," he writes. "The Bible calls such manifestations 'signs.' But, as a whole, when it speaks of testimony, it means a word spoken by a man to other men."¹⁶ "Where *this* dynamic word of the testimony is spoken, there is 'the church.'"¹⁷

A Russian professor, after listening to Barth's lecture on this subject, asked him if testimony might not include deeds and suffering as well as words. "I would only remark," Barth answered, "that the New Testament knows nothing of a church which is purified and washed in the blood of the martyrs. On the whole—and I cannot help it—the word testimony is never used for what martyrs do and suffer. . . . The New Testament reports the death of only one martyr, Stephen. It is his sermon, however, which makes him a witness, and not his suffering."¹⁸

The New Testament, by Barth's own admission, relates the death of only one martyr. Yet Barth not only turns the failure of the author of Luke-Acts to describe Stephen's suffering and death as "testimony" into a subordination of martyrdom to the sermon, a development we clergymen can doubtless view with considerable equanimity. He converts such verbal testimony into a definitive criterion for ascertaining the whereabouts of the church. I cannot help wondering just what criterion might have taken its place if the *Nazareth Weekly Review* had sent a more competent reporter to cover the story of Stephen's martyrdom.

The functional approach to Scripture, commonly hailed in theory and seldom pursued in practice, may well be on the verge of a dramatic breakthrough. Challenges¹⁹ prodding the church in this direction, along with existentialist philosophy²⁰ and works of the

linguistic analysts,²¹ include the revitalization of the world's old religions²² and the growing irrelevance at home²³ and abroad of the traditional evangelistic gimmicks.²⁴ Under growing pressure from these and other sources, Biblical theologians have begun to substitute the bread-and-butter of verbs for the crusts of speculative ontology.²⁵ Emphasis on status is giving way to stress on function as the key to their interpretation of the Biblical message. The contributions of Biblical scholars to the Anderson collection marks an impressive and, I suspect, representative witness to this changing stance. Of their six essays in this volume, at least three, those by G. E. Wright,²⁶ Johannes Blauw²⁷ and F. N. Davey,²⁸ consistently follow a line of interpretation that would put them in this last category. Donald G. Miller²⁹ makes a few slips in a compromising direction, but the bulk of his article is also marked by vivid reflection of the

Testament Basis for the Christian Mission," *The Theology of the Christian Mission*, pp. 17-30.

²¹ The message has gotten through, at least in theory, to many missiologists, as Geoffrey Allen, *The Theology of Missions* (London: SCM Press, Ltd., 1943), p. 29, long since illustrated in deploring "the convention" of calling "non-Christian areas heathen or pagan lands. . . . This language . . . is . . . deeply anachronistic, and false to the realities of the situation today."

²² See the sharply critical review by L. Elbert Wethington, *The International Review of Mission* (1959), pp. 469-472, of the revival of Hendrik Kraemer's older view, now largely modified, by Edmund Perry, *The Gospel in Dispute* (Garden City, New York: Doubleday and Co., Inc., 1958).

²³ While not a native American, Colin Williams' *Where in the World* (New York: National Council of the Churches of Christ in the U.S.A., 1963) and *What in the World* (by the same publisher, 1964) form a watershed, I believe, in the criticism of obsolete evangelism in this country, for in them he goes far beyond a hand-wringing analysis of a depressing situation.

²⁴ See Alan Walker, *The Whole Gospel for the Whole World* (New York: Abingdon Press, 1957), for recognition of the Christian antidote, at once profoundly Biblical and vitally relevant, to the now irrelevant evangelism inflicted upon us by nineteenth-century pietistic individualism. More explicitly theological treatments of the problem appear in Julian N. Hartt, *Toward a Theology of Evangelism* (New York: Abingdon Press, 1955); Douglas Webster, *What Is Evangelism?* (London: The Highway Press, 1959); Hans J. Margull, *Theologie der Missionarischen Verkündigung: Evangelization als Dekumenscher Problem* (Stuttgart: Evangelischer Verlagwerk, 1959); et al.

²⁵ G. E. Wright, *op. cit.*, p. 22.

²⁶ *Ibid.*

²⁷ "The Biblical View of Man in His Religion," pp. 31-41.

²⁸ "The Gospel According to St. John and the Christian Mission," pp. 85-93.

²⁹ "Pauline Motives for the Christian Mission," pp. 72-84.

¹⁶ *God in Action*, p. 95.

¹⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 97.

¹⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 131.

¹⁹ See especially Lesslie Newbigin's discussion of the current situation in *One Body, One Gospel, One World* (London: Wm. Carling and Co., Ltd., 1958), pp. 8-13.

²⁰ As mediated through its influence on current Biblical theology, quite often at a distant and unacknowledged remove, as would tend to be the case with G. Ernest Wright, "The Old

¹⁵ "Christ's Ministry and Our Discipleship," *Biblical Realism Confronts the Nation* (Paul Peachey, ed.; Lebanon, Penna.: Sowers Printing Co., 1963), pp. 186-187.

dynamic concerns peculiar to this method of interpretation. That puts only Barth³⁰ and Cullmann³¹ outside the pale, but numerous of their writings stamp them as front-line contributors in this movement to replace abstraction with action, concept with conduct, doctrine with decision, status with service, religion with faith.

Nowhere has this method been employed with greater consistency and, I would guess, impact than among certain leading Dutch missiologists and ecumenically oriented theologians. Its application is especially apparent in the ecclesiology implicit, and quite often explicit, in such representative writers among them as Johannes Blauw,³² Georg F. Vicedom³³ and Hans-Ruedi Weber.³⁴ *The Missionary Nature of the Church*, by Johannes Blauw, may be taken as an outstanding expression of this tendency among theologians of the Netherlands.

Blauw does, indeed, regard the church in mission as the heir of and successor, via St. Paul, to the proselyte activity of Judaism in the dispersion. Biblical commands and precedents and forms likewise matter to him, but he views all of these as playing a strictly subordinate role. The foundation and motivation for the mission of the church is, he contends, the demolition, by the Lord of all history and the God of all creation, of every wall of partition in and through Jesus Christ. Thus understood, the mission of the church is both the product of the mission of God in Christ and the instrument for its realization.³⁵

Blauw's work has the special merit of setting the history of Israel, old and new, within the parenthesis of the divine activity of the one God, rather than the other way around. Drawing inferences about the meaning of

election from the perspective of that Biblical testimony to God authenticated in Jesus Christ, he concludes that any belief in the possibility of being the church, as Israelites or Christians, without mission reflects a profound misunderstanding of the Biblical notion of election. He launches his investigation of the meaning of election with a fresh examination of the primeval history in light of several important recent studies, paying special attention to Gerhard von Rad's great commentary on Genesis. Election for service in behalf of the one God to all mankind, he concludes, has always been the constituting element for the people of God. "The church which has been chosen out of the world has been chosen for this end—that she performs for the world the service of giving witness to the kingdom of God which has come and is coming in Jesus Christ. . . . The triune God who is involved with the world in the *sending* of the prophets, of Jesus Christ, and of the Holy Spirit, also sends the apostles and the church."³⁶

This view carries with it the plain implication that, apart from the self-giving service of the sent in obedience to the Sender, neither Israel nor Christendom nor any other community can justifiably claim the title, "people of God," for itself. Hand in hand with this notion goes the corollary idea that membership in this community, except for God's deliberate exclusion of some and automatic protection of others, may be a *quite* shifting matter. Old members, by refusing to heed the call of the Sender, may be dropped from that body; and former nonmembers, by heeding that call, may be added to that body.³⁷ Or to employ language suggested by Norman Gottwald's description³⁸ of the relationship between God and the prophet, we might say of the relationship between God and the church: The church remains a human community but is so caught up into the selfhood of Christ that neither God

nor church can be known outside a marvelous unity in mission despite an abiding personal duality. J. C. Hoekendijk has written just the words with which to conclude my discussion of both the functional approach to the Scriptures and the dynamic view of the church which Blauw derives therefrom: "The church *stands* nowhere; she unfolds herself; she happens; she develops as the Gospel of the Kingdom is delivered to the world. . . . Therefore the church has no designated place but is a temporary home, a settlement which never really becomes a home, headed outward towards the ends of the world and forward to the ends of time. . . . To bear testimony of the Kingdom to the world is her real work (*opus proprium*); but it is not really *her* work, but the work of the Lord. . . . To the extent that the church has part in this work—the apostolate—she is 'the church.'"³⁹

As a reminder of the work of the Lord and, by the same token, the mission of the church, but even more, as a means of facilitating the communion in which this work can be clarified and prosecuted, in the view of the exponents of the functional approach, this is why the Bible ever came to be written. This is also why, they would likewise insist, it must never cease to be read.

A Comparison and a Choice

Despite virtually unanimous agreement as to the historical character of the Christian faith, the first three of the foregoing approaches to the Bible would hardly incline one to think of it in historical terms. Whether commandment, precedent, form, all alike find in the Bible a historical guide unhistorically given, henceforth and evermore to be obeyed and treated as the norm of discipleship or mission. As a consequence, the words of Scripture, fundamentally unaltered and unalterable, supplant the Word of God, the threatening and surprising God who joins us to offer comfort when we need it and to stir up trouble when we least expect it. Quite apart from the impotence of such a view to cope with either the problems of modern man or the challenges of

³⁰ Johannes Blauw, *The Missionary Nature of the Church*, cites K. Barth, *Kirchliche Dogmatik*, IV, 3, pp. 874-875, where he delineates both the existence and task of the Christian in terms of witness, to refute Bishop Stephen Neill's statement: "As far as I know, no one has yet set to work to think out the theology of the church in terms of that one thing for which it exists."

³¹ See *Ibid.*, p. 158, n. 32, e.g.

³² *Ibid.*

³³ *The Mission of God*, trans. by G. A. Thiele and Dennis Hilgendorf (St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 1965).

³⁴ *The Militant Ministry* (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1963).

³⁵ *The Missionary Nature of the Church*, p. 105.

³⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 120.

³⁷ Blauw, *Ibid.*, p. 160, puts it unequivocally: "One of the greatest and haughtiest heresies in the history of the church is the identification of the institution with this community of the Kingdom." He expresses special gratitude, as do many, for the work of Nils A. Dahl, *Das Volk Gottes* . . . (Oslo: Bybwad, 1941).

³⁸ *Op. cit.*, p. 36.

³⁹ Quoted in Georg F. Vicedom, *op. cit.*, p. 85.

the modern church, it undercuts the claim of the Christian faith to be a historical religion. It can hardly be expected to do justice to man in his twentieth-century setting. It does not even begin to do justice to man in his first-century setting.

The treatment of the Matthean version of the Great Commission (and the same goes for every other similar passage) as the basis for the mission of the church leaves many questions unanswered. Since Jesus issued this command to the eleven apostles, how can we be sure he intended that we should succeed them in the performance of this mission? How does one make a disciple, by getting him to follow Jesus or obey God? Does he mean that we are to make disciples of all nations or only of some people from all nations? And how shall they be baptized, by pouring, sprinkling, immersion? If by immersion, shall it be face forward or otherwise? Then, what about "the age"? Are we still in it, or did it come to an end, as Luther contended, with the proclamation of the gospel throughout the earth?

This approach to the Bible has yet to yield satisfactory answers to elementary historical questions about the mission of the ancient church. It can hardly be expected to yield adequate solutions to the pressing theological and practical problems concerning the mission of the modern church.

Search of the Bible for precedents leads one, inevitably, to the same sort of frustration. As evidence of this fact, let us consider two oft-asked questions these days: (1) Shall we carry the gospel to the Jews? (2) If other planets turn out to be inhabited, should we seek to evangelize them? (Anticipating your affirmative answer to the latter question, I am tempted to ask a third question: In keeping with the spirit of the comity plan, should not the National Council of Churches cede its right to this territory to Carl McIntyre and the American Council of Christian Churches?) Getting back now to our two questions, the first one takes us straight back to the "Jesus-or-Paul" controversy. At any rate, according to Romans 9-11, the *kairos* for the proclama-

tion of the gospel to the Jews has not dawned.⁴⁰ Here to be told to walk *In His Steps* is not enough. One must likewise be told to whom his steps belong, whether Jesus or Paul. The Biblical precedents for dealing with our second question provide even less help. As a matter of fact, there are no such precedents. The Bible reports the orbital flights of two or three prophetic astronauts, but any report of their findings, if made, apparently was confined to members of the heavenly council.

These examples illustrate the futility of turning the Bible into a treasury of examples for contemporary man. It may be easy enough for modern man to understand how the telescoped eschatology of the New Testament drastically curtailed the interest of the early Christians in economic and political institutions. But he can neither understand nor make sense of the expression of a like disinterest in such matters by modern Christians who, paradoxically, insist on a "blood, sweat, and tears" incarnation and, further, have long since abandoned both all hope and all fear of Jesus' return on the clouds of heaven.

The pragmatic test of discipleship implicit in Jesus' words, "You will know them by their fruits," provides a criterion for challenging Barth's elevation of the sermon as the unassailable form of Christian witness *par excellence*. Not that I would care to challenge his statement about its prominence on the basis of his specific reference to Stephen, even though Stephen's witness, I suspect, can hardly be so neatly categorized. If the issue involved nothing more than a historical judgment about the chief element in the witness of a single man, the difference would be of little value beyond that of adjudicating the professional claims of rival historians and nourishing popular interest in antiquity. I might add, though, that my objection to Barth, on methodological grounds, would not be reduced one whit if he could produce infallible evidence in support of his judgment about the cruciality of Stephen's sermon to his Christian witness and, beyond that, could prove

conclusively that Stephen bore the name of Legion, indicative of his role as representative of the entire corporation of Christian martyrs. I have grave doubts, in other words, about the validity of a one-for-one translation of *Heilsgeschichte* into dogmatic theology. But I object even more strenuously, and without qualm or apology, to the transformation of *Heilsgeschichte* into prophecy.

To contend that the sermon must play the crucial role in twentieth-century Christian witness just because it played the crucial role in first-century Christian witness is tantamount to saying twentieth-century Christians must not ride in cars because first-century Christians rode on donkeys. The argument may not sound quite as crass as Billy Graham's magical formula, "The Bible says!" but it is no different in principle. If there is one belief to which the New Testament comes close to bearing unanimous witness, it is the divine impatience with all formal straitjackets. God is far more concerned with the reality and integrity of man's witness than he is with its pedigree or form. That awareness moved Jesus, despite a healthy respect for the traditions and forms of the scribes and Pharisees, to scuttle many of those traditions and to forge new forms on the anvil of his own communion with God. We might well ask ourselves whether allegiance to his spirit rather than the letter of the New Testament might not require us to deal similarly with some of our inherited traditions and forms. Might not the same kind of concern for Christian witness that prompted the early Christians to elevate the sermon to top place move us to relegate it to a less prominent position?

The application of Jesus' "fruits" test to the Negro struggle for civil rights hardly justifies the rejection of this possibility out of hand. Martin Luther King, in his 1963 letter from the Birmingham jail confessed to being "greatly disappointed with the white church and its leadership."⁴¹ He went on to say in that letter: "I had the strange feeling when I was suddenly catapulted into the leadership of the bus protest in Mont-

⁴⁰ Taken pretty much at face value by Edmund Perry, *op. cit.*, p. 221.

⁴¹ Printed under the title, *Unwise and Untimely* (Nyack, New York: Fellowship of Reconciliation, 1963), p. 13.

gomery . . . that . . . white ministers, priests and rabbis . . . would be . . . our strongest allies."⁴² Do you know why he was surprised? He had been listening to our eloquent sermons on the brotherhood of man, Christian duty, the demands of love and a hundred other fine things. He made one fatal miscalculation. He underestimated the strength of our adherence to the doctrine of the priesthood of all believers. He did not overhear the question we kept asking ourselves: "If laymen can listen to our sermons for decades without being changed for the better, why should anybody expect us to take them seriously?"

Before the March on Washington, the sum total of white Protestantism's contribution to the American struggle for civil rights, apart from a few "fools for Christ," consisted of a plethora of "brotherhood" sermons and a vacuum of brotherly deeds. Because of the expanding character of the latter, some Negro leaders pleaded for an end to sermons on brotherhood until we could produce deeds to match. On August 28, 1963, in Washington, D. C., thousands of clergymen heeded that challenge. That response may not have effected passage of the 1964 Civil Rights Bill but, according to Senator Richard Russell, it did a lot of harm in that direction. Who can forget the witness of the Reverend Bruce Klunder in Cleveland, Ohio? Or that of the Reverend James J. Reeb in Selma, Alabama? Of Mr. Reeb I would say, *it was his martyrdom, and not his sermon, that made him a witness.* By the same token, it was the *presence* of Bishop Lord in Selma and of Bishops Golden and Mathews in Jackson, Mississippi, *not their sermons*, that made them witnesses. Ironically, this witness in deed, far from being secondary to witness in word, may well become the means of restoring the sermon from its present low estate into a position of disturbing relevance and vital power.⁴³

Unlike the authoritarian, exemplary and formal approaches to the Scriptures, the functional ap-

proach takes the Bible seriously both as a theological and a historical document. Because it is a historical document, the Bible invites attention both to its points of departure from and its lines of connection with its environment. Because it is a theological document, bearing witness to the God who both transcends and invades every time and place, it demands criticism even of its own witness, because it is also historically conditioned, from the perspective of the faith in behalf of whose furtherance it bears that witness. Therefore, in search of Biblical guidance in trying to define and implement our Christian mission, to begin with the commandments to engage in missionary activity, the careers and demands of missionaries in the apostolic age or the correct forms of Christian witness, as these are set forth in the Bible, is to put the cart before the horse. Such questions as the attitude of Jesus towards missions, of Paul towards missions to the Jews, and of Stephen to the place of sermons in the spread of the gospel raise issues of great interest. But these attitudes derive from concern for the will and demand of God, and they are only present, in fact, because of the inescapable conviction that commitment to God compelled decisions in relation to the overriding needs and pressing situations of their day.⁴⁴ Their decisions, as they are concretized in the Biblical documents, mark the coincidence of the pull of faith and the push of history.

Granted this setting for the Scriptures, we should be greatly surprised to find theological relevance apart from historical relativity; or to put it personally and in terms of our own special interest, we should be greatly surprised to read the Biblical passages having to do with missions without, at the same time, hearing a new and surprising word from God concerning its proper interpretation and contemporary appropriation. Barth has put it exactly, proving again that the great Swiss theologian is his own best critic. "We are called," he says, "to hasten to the place where the prophets and apostles are making their stand. They are standing face to face with

the coming God. They call us to their own side; not for their own sake but for the sake of God."⁴⁵ Standing there, on the boundary between faith and unbelief, confronted by the God to whom they and we bear a common witness, we can affirm their relevance without denying their relativity; learn from *their* words without equating it with *his* Word; appropriate God's word to them without mistaking it for God's word to us; and be faithful to our common mission without seeking to duplicate the sphere or the form of their labors.

Rehabilitation and Innovation

Martin Buber has written the Golden Text for the prosecution of the task of seeking a Biblical basis for mission in line with the functional approach to the Scriptures: "Change and preservation function in the identical current."⁴⁶ I say that because, simultaneously, this approach demands both a deep appreciation of the past and genuine openness to the future. As evidence of the former, I shall seek to show that, far from compelling dismissal of the passages of Scriptures often employed in line with one of the other methods of interpretation, it enables us to make sense of them without turning them into fetishes or, worse, Biblical props for defense of a confined theology and a confining mission. Then, in support of the latter, namely its demand for openness to the future, I shall set forth a series of theses that, I believe, will enable us to give contemporary shape to our mission without betraying its true and abiding function.

In line with the current tendency to treat all the Evangelists, and not just the author of John, as independent theologians of a dynamic church, Johannes Blauw interprets the Matthean version of the Great Commission, like the universal passages toward the close of the other Gospels, as a creative response to the challenge posed by Paul's evangelization of the world. "Is it too far-fetched to assume," he asks, "that it is also because Paul's apostleship had brought the whole world within their horizon

⁴² *Ibid.*, p. 14.

⁴³ So suggests Will D. Campbell, *Race and the Renewal of the Church* (Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1962), pp. 73-86.

⁴⁴ See Vincent, *op. cit.*, pp. 188-190.

⁴⁵ *God in Action*, p. 6f.

⁴⁶ *Moses* (Oxford: The University Press, 1944), p. 18.

that the authors of the four Gospels (which were all written later than Paul's epistles!) had them culminate in the description of a task that encompasses the whole world? Have they not also come to a better understanding of the import of Jesus' words and work through the expansion of the church over all of the world that lay within their horizon, the *oecumene*?"⁴⁷

A quite different sort of question, but one pointing in the same general direction, might also be raised in this connection. Could it not be that the authors of the Gospels—by allowing themselves to function, as Jesus did, in the service of the mission of God—discovered in Jesus' formulation of that mission the need for correction and expansion? To reject this possibility out of hand, as an expression of blasphemy, would not only impose arbitrary limits to Biblical criticism, but it would likewise betray a supernaturalistic view of the incarnation.

Blauw's devastation of Pauline dispensationalism, according to which the era of the mission to the Jews must await completion of the mission to the gentiles, leaves Paul no less "the apostle" but something more of a man. He justifies Paul's action in line with his "Back-to-the Bible-Hour" scheme of missions without, for one minute, viewing it as a suitable blueprint for contemporary missions. Paul errs here theologically, in Blauw's view, by "accentuating the *chosenness* instead of the act of divine choosing (election), which election was for service."⁴⁸ Psychologically, though, Paul may be excused for concentrating his evangelistic activities among the gentiles because, Blauw speculates, this was the "only way to continue to do something with his days for an Israel which was for the most part callous."⁴⁹ (Quite frankly, if I may speak parenthetically, the New Testament itself would seem to me to be a source of hopeless embarrassment to the tendency to take Paul's chronology for missionary expansion at face value. Quite apart from the apparent failure of his message to get

through to the author of Luke—Acts and Simon Peter, Paul the convert from Judaism stands as a monument to the failure of Paul as primitive Christianity's Board of Missions' schedule-maker.)

This Blauwine interpretation of Romans 9-11 commends itself for two reasons. It exempts God of all responsibility for the arbitrary polarization of Jews and gentiles in the formulation of the Pauline version of Christian mission. Even more importantly, it deprives us of all excuse for the perpetuation of this division.

A meticulous study of church order in primitive Christianity prompts Eduard Schweizer to relegate the sermon and, with it, all other forms of Christian witness, not just to a secondary, but a dispensable, place in the economy of God. He concedes that the message about Christ with which the church confronts the world is "urgent and final," but "the church that knows this," he hastens to add, "knows at the same time that in its religious phenomena, its ascetic achievement, and its . . . order it is in itself only part of the world, because only the miracle of God's grace, continually repeated in freedom for the sake of God's faithfulness, is its life. *This miracle, however, never becomes the church's own property by allowing it either to guarantee the miracle to anyone who complies with the church order or fulfills certain prescribed religious moral requirements, or to forget that God can completely bypass the church's organization in calling people to himself.*"⁵⁰

By indicating the way the functional approach to the Scriptures might deal with those passages traditionally employed in quest of the Biblical basis for mission, I have tried to indicate the shape of our task, looking backward, for compliance with Lesslie Newbigin's⁵¹ demand for a full-orbed theocentric Trinitarian basis for Christian missions. I had hoped to be able, looking forward, to be even more explicit and exhaustive in suggesting the shape of things to come. Time precludes the realiza-

tion of that hope, but in the time that remains, by setting forth four theses in response to Anderson's questions, I believe I can indicate the direction in which a program based on the foregoing approach would move.

1. *The God who came and comes, in creation, in Christ, in consummation, neither acknowledges nor wills any limitation to the free and sovereign reign of his reconciling love.* Space and time, far from incarcerating the purpose of God within limits imposed from the outside, are to be seen as channels for the communication of his love. Hence "all the nations" and "the ends of the earth," viewed from the perspective of "the ongoing work of Christ," are not to be regarded as marks of the last dispensation in the evolution of Christian missions. They are to be viewed, rather, as indicators of the absence of every sort of barrier and boundary, geographical or temporal, to the love and, therefore, the mission of God. They are, by the same token, to be viewed as indicators of the absence of every sort of barrier and boundary, geographical or temporal, to the love and, therefore, the mission of the people of God.⁵²

If here someone should object to this characterization by appeal to traces of henotheism in Israelite history, let it be admitted that such primitivism does occasionally rear its head in the Bible. But let us not forget this counterbalancing fact: even though certain Israelites may have been practicing henotheists, the Creator who revealed himself in the face of Jesus Christ was not and is not a henotheistic God.⁵³ And just as all of life in every place and time derives its meaning from his purpose, even so must the church in every place and time cut the cloth of its mission on the pattern of his mission.

2. *Life in faith does not depend for its origin or validity on*

⁴⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 78: "We are invited to participate in an activity of God which is the central meaning of creation itself. We are invited to become, through the presence of the Holy Spirit, participants in the Son's loving obedience to the Father."

⁵³ Gerhard V. Rad, *Old Testament Theology*, I, trans. by D. M. G. Stalker (Edinburgh: Oliver and Boyd, 1962), pp. 136-163, interprets primeval history in Genesis 1-11 in terms of a cosmic covenant, i.e., with the nations, not Israel, as Yahweh's partner.

⁴⁷ *The Missionary Nature of the Church*, p. 125.

⁴⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 167.

⁴⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 168.

⁵⁰ *Church Order in the New Testament*, trans. by Franks Clarke (London: SCM Press, Ltd., 1961), p. 226.

⁵¹ See *The Relevance of Trinitarian Doctrine for Today's Mission* (London: Edinburgh House Press, 1963).

any formulation of the faith.⁵⁴ One would certainly have to contend, on the basis of Christian history, that it is quite the reverse. Every formulation of the faith depends on life in faith alike for its origin and validity.⁵⁵

Any serious appropriation of this insight, instead of taking the Bible out from under the umbrella of mythology, would establish it there all the more securely. For granted Bultmann's definition of mythology as the presentation of the other-worldly in terms of the this-worldly,⁵⁶ what we need is not more "demythologizing" but more "remythologizing." Myth thus defined would comprehend not only virgin birth, transfiguration, resurrection, and the like, but all the persons of the Holy Trinity and much else, besides—in fact, everything else purporting to describe the action of God in nature or history. And that, I trust you will agree, covers a great deal.

To suppose, therefore, that the future of vital faith hinges on the literal transmission of any theological term, be it the name of Christ or the language of the inherited creeds, would be to reduce Christian faith to a mythology. To suppose that we can say something of Christ that cannot be said, with equal accuracy, of the Lord of mankind, marks an expression, not of full-orbed Trinitarianism, but of a unitarianism of the second person of the Trinity. And one might ask, must we not pass similar judgment on the denial of the possibility of salvation for those who, despite their ascription to the Lord of mankind all the grace of Christ and their manifestation of discipleship in a life of obedient service to their fellows, nevertheless have an aversion to the address of God

under the name of Christ? Not only would I answer this question in the affirmative. I would say that Biblical Christology itself, which is far from either adequately or accurately represented in the exclusive claim uttered in Acts 4:12 by a Pentecostal preacher, would pose no insuperable barrier to the assembly of fellow believers under the name of the Lord of mankind. For as Gregory Dix has well said:

When Christians took to calling Jesus Lord instead of Messiah, the Liberals, wrongly, supposed that they were 'heightening the Christology.' The point is that Jewish messianism does not yield a Christology of status in metaphysical terms—it yields a Christology of function in terms of history. But the function of the Messiah is undoubtedly a divine function, . . . namely his inauguration of God's Kingdom. The Messiah's action in history is God's own action.⁵⁷

The God of our creation is identical with the God of our redemption. Therefore, if and when we identify believers in such a manner as to exclude from the people of God the Redeemer those who belong to the people of God the Creator, we challenge the Christology of the Gospels and the Christian doctrine of the Trinity at their most crucial point. All men share a common humanity, irrespective of whether they presently do, or ever shall, share in common "one faith" or "one baptism" (Ephesians 4:5). And they just may share, a fact to which the Bible itself bears telling witness, a common life in faith without being able to subscribe to a common formulation of the faith.

3. "Salvation" history differs from "secular" history, not because of preoccupation with a different set of facts, but by reason of its interpretation of a segment of those facts from the perspective of what Tillich calls the "depth" dimension.⁵⁸ It is an "eyes-of-faith" report of a slice of so-called "secular" history. But the fact that most of the slices of history have been re-

ported as "secular" and not "salvation" history should not be taken as evidence of the absence of God's presence in any slice of history. It only proves, first of all, that the writing of history is the work of man and not God and, secondly, that God's appearance in human history, even in Jesus Christ, is always partially hidden. If this implies, as I think it does, that the secular historian could turn salvation history into secular history, it likewise means that a "full-orbed theocentric, Trinitarian" theologian not only may—he would!—report secular history as salvation history.

4. God is related to all human culture as its ground and goal, its source and hope, its Lord and Judge, yet his reign must never be identified with any human culture. If this implies an end to all thought of an autonomous church or state or economic life, it likewise calls for the acknowledgement in church and state and economic life of the claim of a transcendent reality.⁵⁹

This recognition of the ambiguous character of the divine presence in culture will save us from both the utopian demand for perfect security and the pietistic quest for perfect purity.⁶⁰ We will not claim for our culture what belongs to God alone. But on the other hand, we will not seek for our culture anything but what God alone can give. In other words, we will join the dialogue with God in the midst of culture in pursuit of the hope of transforming it in the image of his will, yet all the while fully aware that he, and he alone, can embody what we seek to make.

Conclusion

I have not suggested answers to many of the questions implicit in my topic. That was not really my purpose in the preparation of this paper. It was, rather, to indicate a viable stance for further reflection on the crucial issues involved in the relationship between the aim of Christian mission and the Word of God.

⁵⁹ See Norman K. Gottwald, "Prophetic Faith and Contemporary International Relations," *Biblical Realism Confronts the Nation*, pp. 72-74, for a penetrating illumination of this paradox.

⁶⁰ *Ibid.*, pp. 82-86.

⁵⁴ Emil Brunner, *Truth as Encounter*, trans. by David Cairns (Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1964), p. 132: "It . . . becomes unmistakably clear that what God wills to give us cannot really be given in words, but only in manifestation: Jesus Christ, God himself in *persona* is the real gift."

⁵⁵ Brunner, *Ibid.*, p. 196f, praises Luther for recovering this insight; and he castigates Melancthon who, in place of faith and obedience, substituted as the marks of the true church "objective criteria, ironclad . . . standards."

⁵⁶ Schubert M. Ogden, *Christ Without Myth* (New York: Harper and Row, 1961), p. 24, expresses this polarity in terms of the "un-worldly" and "worldly."

⁵⁷ *Jew and Greek* (Philadelphia: Dacre Press, 1953), p. 79.

⁵⁸ Cf. Lesslie Newbigin, "The Gathering Up of History into Christ," *The Missionary Church in East and West* (Charles C. West and David M. Paton, eds.; London: SCM Press, Ltd., 1959), pp. 81-90.

WHAT IS GOD DOING IN HIS MISSION IN HISTORY?

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The intent of the question assigned as the topic for examination in this paper is authentically Biblical and prophetic. It demands that we answer two questions: What is happening? and, What is the ultimate consequence for us and posterity of this which is presently happening and in which we are involved in part by choice, in part by inevitabilities?

The first question requires us to avail ourselves of the most thorough knowledge to be provided by social science investigation and by social philosophers. It is now common knowledge that the Biblical prophets themselves were competently informed about the contemporary human affairs of their day. And, additionally, they reported the news "in depth," that is, with the insight of the social philosopher who seeks the relationships and potential patterns among particular groups of events. Yet further emboldened, the prophets dared to suggest the ultimate consequence of the affairs of their lives—ultimate for themselves and for mankind, indeed, even for the whole of creation.

All of us recoil for sound reasons from assuming such a threefold prophetic responsibility in our day and for our generation. With our emphasis upon *specialization* in the garnering of social science facts and in the analytical procedures of interpreting these facts; with men walking in space, changing the patterns of human society of an entire continent, splintering the altar of Christ and building impenetrable walls of racial separation around a particular splinter, financially supporting the movement to give the United Nations the authority to administer law and order internationally yet by-passing the United Nations for purposes of outmoded national sovereignties—with the fantastic, rapid intense character of human life today, for any person or group to assume the role of prophet today is, as for other reasons it always has been, to risk playing the part of the fool.

If the cautions of scholarship and the complexities of circumstances

were not sufficient to prevent us from speaking in answer to the first two prophetic demands posed for this paper, then surely the present situation of theological deliberation should dissuade us. Who among even the bravest of us dares to use the word 'God' any more without grave trepidation, to speak as if our auditors any longer had any common denominator in their experience or understanding for the word 'God,' to use the term without acknowledging our awareness of how little credibility is attached to claims for any "objective" referent whatsoever for this term?

Those of us who have competence in the use of the original Biblical languages know full well that the Hebrew word translated into English as 'God' is alien to the ancient, formative faith of the Israelites and that this word did not gain acceptability either with ease or rapidly as a legitimate designator for "the Shield of Abraham," "the Fear of Isaac," or "the Mighty One of Jacob." The word 'God' is too vacuous both in the English and in its Hebrew equivalent to translate the particularity of the Presence with Whom the Israelites engaged themselves. Further, the word in every modern language is used as a designator for such a heterogenous and incompatible group of supposed Ultimate Realities as to confound it to the dictionaries of archaisms. It is neither shocking nor grievous to informed people to hear that "God is dead." What such people immediately inquire is, "Which one is it this time?" for the obituary page of the gods, though well filled in small print, is still on the typesetter's machine and, thankfully, the typesetter's day has not ended yet.

Even and especially in the company of fellow travelers of the Way, we enter a plea of reluctance to speak of 'God.' We restrain ourselves from recalling the atrocities committed under the name and banner of 'God.' It suffices to cite the ambiguity and disrepute of the word. Our reluctance to speak of 'God' is a matter of faith conviction as well as academic precision. This

conviction will become more explicit in the sequel.

Likewise, we confess to concurrence with those contemporary theologians who find "history" to be a highly dubious category for describing human experience as understood in the Bible. It is not without significance that there is not a single Hebrew word that bears the meanings with which the word "history" is freighted. And the Greek New Testament is devoid of the Greek words for "history."

Having registered all of these reservations about the question, What is God Doing in His Mission in History? but reminding the reader that the first paragraph of this paper began by affirming the authentically Biblical and prophetic thrust of the question, I shift now to another posture vis-a-vis the question.

I

While our trepidation of being prophetic is altogether warranted, prophetic we must be! As Christians we are those to whom the "God" of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob, the Father of our Lord, Jesus whom we call Christ, has assigned a legacy of responsibility to be prophetic. Our brethren, the Jews, have Jewish reasons for perpetuating prophetic faith, which means interpreting human events in the dimensions outlined above. But we Christians by our very claim announce ourselves as prophets, for in one sense our message is simply that in raising Jesus from the dead and breaking the limitations of mortality, the Spirit of Truth has descended ("been poured out") upon all flesh. The Spirit of Truth is the Spirit of prophecy, and prophecy may now come from any quarter of the human race. Potentially all men are prophets, but it is certainly incumbent upon Christians to look for and discern the signs of the times and to declare what is seen, and to raise up children who will perpetuate this prophetic generation. We do this in the confidence of John's Gospel, that the Spirit is leading us *and others*, even as Jesus promised,

into all truth, even into the deep secrets of the divine world.

Yet while we have been made sons of the Truth and it does not become us to deny this relationship, we are not the Truth, and even to us sons the ways of Truth are often inscrutable, demanding that we be ready therefore at all times to be corrected, even vetoed, concerning what we have understood to be happening in our world. We never hear all that is being said nor perceive all that is being done. Admission of the partiality (in every sense of the word) of our perception and understanding, and hence a tentativeness to all that we say, is one expression of what is sometimes called the hallmark of the Christian spirit, namely, humility. This tentativeness is necessary in order that we may keep up with the dynamic world and so be speaking prophetically about the present rather than the past. When we indulge ourselves in the past, we lose the prophetic opportunity and possibility, even as we lose them when we take flight into the unborn future.

Whatever word we use for the Reality of our faith—be it 'God,' 'the Spirit of Truth,' or whatever—to be Biblical and to be in character with Jesus whom we call Christ, that word must carry the sense of *presence*. The "essence" of this Reality we do not know, but its Presence we do know. And because that Presence evokes from us a response of our total organism we speak of a *personal response* to the *Personal Presence*. We do not need to go beyond that phrase "Personal Presence" to say Personal Presence of God, of Truth, et cetera. Scripture, tradition, and personal experience testify to a lively Presence in the world. That is sufficient room and ground for our prophetic stance.

From the anthropomorphisms of God in the Garden of Eden, to "the Word became flesh and dwelt among us, full of grace and truth," to Paul's "God was in Christ reconciling the world unto himself," right down to our own unarticulated and uncanonized reasons for presently considering the "whither" of Christian responsibility henceforward, there is a tradition of Presence in the world with which

all men who know it must reckon. We have known it as the Presence of loving forgiveness, of justifying rebuke, of helplessness and of strength, of defeat and triumph, of death and rebirth. So of this Presence in our world we do not doubt.

Note that we said "of this Presence in our world"—not in history. We will pick this phrase up again for closer scrutiny, but first let us comment further about the Presence and its tradition. In the tradition of the Presence it is nowhere assumed that the earth or the universe or "our world" is the complete or only dwelling-place of the Presence. Even in times of despair, or in other words, when the Presence was eclipsed, the eclipse was testimony to this Presence. The Exile of the Israelites to Babylon precipitated despair, for did not the destruction of the Temple in Jerusalem mean that there was no longer a habitation in the world for the Holy One of Israel? Ezekiel countered this despair with his own experiences of the "glory" of the Holy One who had removed himself *with his people* to Babylon and there, rather than in the ruins of Jerusalem or in the sanctuaries of the highest heavens, the Presence was to be apprehended. When the second Temple was built, a strong opinion developed that much was lacking and nothing more conspicuously and significantly than the Divine Presence. But a hard-headed realism of Jewish piety countered with, "Thou art enthroned upon the praises of Israel" (Psalms 22:3) and "If two sit together and words of Torah are spoken between them, the Divine Presence rests between them" (Pirke Aboth, 111.2).

While it became public dogma that the highest heavens could not contain, nor deepest Sheol exclude, the Divine Presence, and that his ultimate dwelling was not known even to his own peculiar people, it became also axiomatic that he tabernacled among men on earth. The form of his being present could not be predicted, but the conviction that he would be present was verified in divers and sundry manifestations and gave birth to the further inference that he was willing and able to make his Presence known in many unanticipated forms. So whether in audition or

vision, by face, ark, cloud, or glory, in the triumph or defeat of his people in battle, or in the sound of the silent voice—the Presence was present, and the Israelites were asked to reckon with it. To understand the aspirations, foibles, conspiracies, nobilities, power politics, and mortality of men in terms of the appearances of the Divine Presence—this was the "calling" of the prophets. And looked at with the assets of hindsight we can see that the prophetic reporting made good sense out of the facts of what was happening at the time.

Rather than dwell upon the details of the finished Creation, these prophets gave to their contemporaries the sense that each present was a contribution to something far more significant than any of them could imagine; that unimaginable finished Creation would incorporate and be inseparable from the particular "presents" of each generation; hence, the responsibilities of each generation to the Presence of its "presents (nows)" had consequences extending beyond that particular generation. No generation could live unto itself—it was not the first generation; it could not be the last; each generation was both the recapitulation and the anticipation of whole generation of man.

II

So, the prophetic tradition calls us to the Presence of the present. The Bible speaks of this in terms of "the Living God." "The 'God' of our father Abraham is not the 'God' of the dead, but of the living." And "why seek the Christ among the dead?" Still more pertinent, why seek to serve him among dead issues and outmoded notions?

It is both awful and awesome to be thrust into the real present and to be asked to discern here the Real Presence, and to act accordingly. But our Christian prophetic calling is "to serve the present age."

It does not take a Karl Jaspers to convince us that "Something serious has happened." Our present world is grand and awful in almost incomparable degrees and dimensions. Christopher Dawson aptly titled one of his books, *The Movement of World Revolution*. And that movement has not

stopped either in Europe where Dawson thinks it began, nor in the Americas across which it spread, nor in Asia where it returned the continent to the Asians, nor in Africa where whole "peoples" are being catapulted at supersonic speed from primeval cultures into modern industrial societies. "Every wind that sweeps the ocean brings tidings from afar, of nations in commotion." But the revolution is neither national, continental, hemispheric, or planetary in scope. It is a revolution of mankind and a revolution of the universe. If we consider some of the elements of this revolution, we will have less occasion to wonder that the symbols by which men have lived for a few hundred years are inadequate without some adjustment for those of us who have to live through the upheavals of the emerging universal culture.

The first and most apparent observation to make is that the revolution has not spent itself anywhere it has begun. Life in the "original 13 colonies" of the United States is in as much turmoil of restructuring as life in deepest Congo. Nostalgia for the normal and the stable is a luxury no sane person anywhere dare try to afford. Order, if found at all, can be found only in the transitional. To live at all is to live in and come to terms with change. (I am appalled when I consider that the rural women of Georgia through those naive programs on Christian mission to which I as a small child was taken by my mother contributed to this present revolution. The only more appalling fact for reflection is the unpreparedness of us churchmen for the revolution which our missionary societies helped to incite. Out of the mouths of babes and sucklings in the churches went forth words that came home to haunt the churchmen of Jackson, Mississippi; Albany, Georgia; Birmingham, Alabama! You cannot preach to people in "far away lands with strange sounding names" that Christ has set men free for freedom without the word getting back home.)

Secondly, we need to note that "it (nowhere) doth yet appear what we shall be." One of the strikingly impressive facts in university life these days is *the orientation to the*

future. (The popular consumption of books about the "future of industrial man," "the future of mankind," et cetera, indicates that the orientation is now that of our culture.) Increasingly—since especially the 1700's, I believe—there has been a transition from recollection to anticipation as the posture for seeking the truth, a turning from the past and precedents to the future and prospects. This does not mean that a mood of disdain for the past prevails; it does mean that few, if indeed any, of the disciplines of academic research expect to find ultimately meaningful discoveries in digging up the past. That there is still a great deal about the past to be uncovered and recovered, to be understood, and even to be used for guidance, is axiomatic. But I am talking about where people really expect to find what matters—models for a style of satisfying contemporary life. In this regard, "You have heard it said of old" has been superseded by the "but I say . . ." The notion of a once-for-all static cosmos has given way to the notion of an ever expanding, infinitely emerging universe. It is not simply that these new *things* were there all the time and man had not discovered them. We are living with an understanding of what the modern artist Paul Klee refers to as "eternal genesis." "Let there be" is mankind's eternal contemporary and new things appear in his world. We have truly begun to live for what is appearing.

This leads us to face up boldly to a third consideration of our present situation, one already mentioned. *Our world* is not an expression of human pride but a way of understanding human experience. In common parlance and in experience there are a lot of worlds. Fascinatingly, every world seems to be made up of every other world (and scientists are tantalized to find out what is the world inside the world inside the world inside the world, *ad infinitum*, like the replica of the mansion inside the mansion inside the mansion . . . of *Tiny Alice*). The big world of nature is made up of the world of mass, the world of form, the world of color, the world of space, the world of time, the world of animate and the world of inanimate matter.

Each of these sub-worlds in the world of nature has its own network of constitutive worlds. To speak of a world may be to speak of something as infinitely vast as "curved space" or as invisible and infinitesimal as particle-antiparticle (high-energy) physics.

The human world is a part of the natural world. It is one of nature's family of worlds. Yet the human world, *our world*, is vastly more than a nature-made world. To be human, individually and collectively, is to be a world-maker, reshaping nature's patterns and men's art. The human world is the world of cultures, the systems of achievement and meaning which men fashion out of their inheritance from nature and their legacy from other men.

In his relationships to nature man has come of age, the child has become master of his own parent, the human world has encompassed the natural world. Increasingly man has invaded the household of nature, exposed its secrets and bound its powers. Presently we are changing the face of nature as radically as we are changing the face of man and the style of his societies. These present changes promise to be more than cosmetic (skin-deep) for both nature and man. Unlike his predecessors in the scale of life man does not so much adapt himself to nature in order to survive as he survives by adapting nature to himself, but not simply in order to survive. He adapts nature to himself for self-preservation but also for the purposes of his imagination and inventiveness. And he has been at this far longer than even the paleontologists imagined until Africa's ancient gorges began to give up its dead to the living Professor and Mrs. Leakey. Our human ancestor, *homo habilis*, was already a culture and world maker in Africa at least one and one half million years ago!

And now, for better or for worse, the elements of the universe are being manipulated by man's expanding knowledge and dominion of the infinite and the infinitesimal—manipulated to serve the ever-changing goals of man's ever-changing cultures. So successful has been man's interference with the ways of nature that it is now

more accurate to say the natural world is a part of the human world than to speak of the human world as part of the natural world. High energy physicists discovered exactly where they had predicted one of the last antiparticles to remain undetected. Man's stars are in orbit with nature's, and they can do more for man than nature's! These facts augur an extension of human revolution which will restructure human activity far more radically than the reordering brought about by man's interference with the structures of life in Asian and African societies.

Indeed, it is in the light of such considerations as these that reflective people have asked, Does *God* have a world any more? The late Dr. Arthur H. Compton, devout Christian and famed physicist whose research helped lead to the first nuclear chain reaction and eventually the atomic age, examined this question in a sermon at the University of Chicago chapel. Considering man's impressive penetration and successful mastery of nature's secrets and powers of this still early stage of human evolution, Dr. Compton asserted that we may humbly conclude that "God is shifting responsibility for the evolution of life from His own shoulders to ours." In one of his last interviews before death, Dr. Compton confessed, "I have found in my inner experience that the world does, in fact, respond to my efforts."

What further need, then, if any does man have for God? Have we come of age in our relationship to Divine Providence even as with nature? Is God now at our disposal and has the human world swallowed up "God's world" even as it has encompassed the world of nature? Is the universe now at the mercy of the conscience of men and the structures of power which one group builds up to restrain another group from total possession?

It may be worthy of Christian reflection to recall that in the Genesis myth of creation man is given the mandate of creation: "Be fruitful, multiply, fill the earth, and subdue it." In this myth, to man as man, there is committed utter responsibility for dominion over the universe. ("Earth" here

does not refer simply to the planet but to the whole configuration of creation.) Learning a lesson from this myth, then, and confronting our present display of man's manipulative genius, we should be neither surprised nor shocked when atheists "break through" barriers and extend the jurisdiction of man. The Spirit poured out on all flesh may inspire prophetic deed as well as prophetic words from unexpected—unreligious!—quarters.

A fourth consideration concerning *our world* presses in at this point. The once totally sacred world of pristine man has been displaced in modern man's world with the totally secular world. In the sacred world man was at the mercy of anything "power-full"; in the secular world, man is the manager of the powers. The revered "City of God" lies in the ruins of fading memories. The triumphant secular city with its technicature lights up the sky of the future toward which man is racing in his quest for facts, patterns and meaning. No place is more hallowed than any other *in our world*, nor is any time more hallowed than any other. The sanctuary, the shrine, the temple, the church—these are no longer the centers of man's life-orientation, for *our world* is divested of the sacred. The home, the office, the beach, the resort, the funeral parlor—these have more *meaning* than the "house of God" does *for us*. Sunday is as good a day to work as any other day, if there is work we deem necessary or desirable to be done.

Let me hasten to say that I applaud this secularization and find it both compatible with and revelatory of Jesus' remark, "The time will come when the authentic worshipers will worship (neither on one sacred place nor another) in spirit and in truth" (John 4:23).

Finally, let us observe what constitutes effective authority *in our world*. "Once upon a time" men would respond to commonly accepted authority, whether it was book, legislation, or tradition. Because of circumstances already detailed, there is *in our world* no mutual consent, because there is no common denominator of experience in our mass societies. Formerly tradition, the commonly accepted way of doing things, con-

strained people toward cooperative, conforming conduct of their lives. Law could be trusted to maintain order in so diverse an amalgam as the United States—that is, in the nations. But a different mood prevails now *throughout* the world, but especially in the power structures. *In our world* it will not suffice to cite a Book or appeal to a tradition, legal or religious. Other books with other commandments are known, and the national sovereign state is not big enough to inspire mass loyalty and so is outmoded as the guardian of law and order. Many of us want to create new traditions because, among other reasons, the old traditions are incompatible with the secular mentality, the human possibilities, the future orientation, and the dynamic processes of the universal revolution in which we are involved. Anything short of an authority that respects and protects and inspires the confidence of all mankind will not be effective. Yet, at the moment there is no organization with the power to administer the essential business of safeguarding the survival of the race.

What does make sense and command respect *in our world* is the "word become flesh," the man who is as good as his word, whose life is the authentication of life itself. Technically in the study of phenomena of religion and theologically when we become Christocentric, the word for acceptable and effective authority *in our world* is the charismatic person, the person who embodies in himself a life for others, whose true self is neighbor's well-being. Walt Whitman's "Song of the Open Road" is the anthem of the marching revolutionaries of our generation. A few lines will illustrate its relevance and its embodiment of our message:

Afoot and light-hearted I take to
the open road . . .
Henceforth I ask not good fortune . . .
Henceforth I whimper no more . . .
Done with indoor complaints . . .
Strong and content I travel the
open road . . .
(I and mine do not convince by
arguments, similes, rhymes,
We convince by our presence.)

We convince by our presence! By our Presence? The two cannot be separated any more than Yahweh, the God of Israel, could be separated from Israel, the people of Yahweh. The two belong together, not in absorption, but as man and wife become "one flesh" so also our Presence becomes with our presence a new creation, a person with a gift of life for others.

A new community is being constituted in our world out of the reality of a new awareness or perhaps a new manifestation of the Divine Presence. Only its outlines are beginning to appear, but what is not lost from the old structures,

the old tradition, the old profession, is love. Love is the new Presence for "love does not seek its own kind" whether physically or otherwise. In our world the love of authority is giving way to the authority of love, the love of tradition being displaced with a tradition of love that may shatter even lines of demarcation between traditional faiths, the wisdom of love can be seen, however dimly, outwitting the love of wisdom.

At the present time, I have to stop with what amounts to a Quaker Christology, but I am not satisfied with the spirit without the form. And while witnessing the

passing of old forms, I believe that the new form will appear, and when it does it shall be like Christ. Whether it is like God is irrelevant, for I know no other Reality worthy of my loyalty and compelling enough for the awakened mankind-consciousness than that of one who gives up his life for another's well-being. Being present with another, for the sake of the other, is the mission I see underway in the secular structures of our world. How to give this an organizational embodiment consistent with the character of our world is a task the prophet turns over to the priest and congregation!

NEW THRUSTS IN THE THEOLOGY AND LIFE OF THE CHRISTIAN MISSION

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The church is God's mission in and throughout the world. This affirmation, proclaimed widely by Protestant spokesmen and pastors, now has been solidified into dogma by the Roman Catholic Church in *De Ecclesia* (1964). Theologically and in its practical implications this represents a sea-change, for it implies not that the church *has* missions, but that in its very life it is mission.

This shift mirrors a changed world, a post-Christendom (or "post-Constantinian") age, the Ecumenical Movement, and on every continent creative response among the churches in obedience to the Spirit's leading.

The thesis here advanced is that around the globe new thrusts in mission find their meaning within the context of a changed and changing world and of the search—increasingly stimulated by the Ecumenical Movement—for new patterns of responsible corporate Christian witness. In the process a fresh understanding of the church is emerging. This is the century of a new ecclesiology, one grounded in God's mission and in the conviction that mission and unity are inseparably conjoined.

The potential scope suggested by the title of this paper is staggering. Even a brief catalog of new forms as a basis for meaningful generalization would extend these pages

far beyond their limits. The attempt here made is simply to gain an historical and contemporary perspective on major areas of new thrust.

I. A Century of Councils and a New Ecclesiology

The Ecumenical Movement is the direct fruit of nearly 175 years of missionary endeavor. Obedience in mission raised the question of unity. That unity and mission are of one piece is now widely accepted, and John 17:21 has become the symbolic scriptural touchstone for this affirmation. Churches accustomed to separation in the West, encountering one another in common cause in Asia's totally different milieu, suddenly confronted new questions. "Who are we in relation to one another?" "Who are we in relation to God's whole world—to God's men of other faiths?" "In our separation how do we understand ourselves as the people of God's covenant?" The continuing need for answers to these questions has forced the churches to explore the meaning of the church.

That in the ecumenical era they have wrestled with the doctrine of the church is reflected in a century of remarkable councils.

Convened in 1869 and cut short in 1870, the First Vatican Council examined the authority of the church and brought forth the dogma of papal infallibility. A

generation later at Edinburgh in 1910, the World Missionary Conference in exploring the Christian mission discovered that implicit in and essential to its discussions was the larger question of the whole church in its mission and its unity. "Edinburgh, 1910" dealt with church union—overseas, but despite its ban on discussing matters involving theological disagreement, these arose. They gave birth in the mind of Bishop Charles H. Brent to the Faith and Order Movement.¹

Another generation later in July, 1948, The Conference of Orthodox Churches, meeting in Moscow and reflecting largely the view of the Patriarchate in that city, not only disclosed a problem of authority among the Orthodox churches, but also made pronouncements on Anglican orders, on Rome, and on the then soon to be constituted World Council of Churches. Other Orthodox assemblies, representative and more important, have met since 1960 to deal with Orthodoxy's understanding of the church and its related response to Vatican II and the World Council of Churches.

Also in 1948 the constituting First Assembly of the World Council of Churches (WCC) met in Amsterdam. That body stands as a

¹ On Edinburgh's concern for the church and for church unity, see W. Richey Hogg, "Edinburgh, 1910—Ecumenical Keystone," *Religion in Life*, Vol. XXXIX, No. 3, Summer, 1960, pp. 347-350.

new and unique creation. Anglican, Orthodox, and Protestant churches came together in council and declared, "We intend to stay together." Here was an event, initiating a process, that involves the unity of God's people. In the context of ecclesiology, its full meaning invites but still eludes adequate theological understanding.

In 1957 in Prapat, Indonesia, the First Assembly (Preparatory) and in 1959 at Kuala Lumpur, Malaya, the Second Assembly (Inaugural) of the East Asia Christian Conference (EACC) met. These first major gatherings outside "Christendom" of non-Roman churches from traditionally "non-Christian lands" established a mutually supportive structure. Its purpose: to fulfill a common evangelistic task in Asia. Here was another unprecedented emergent—and one with ecclesiological significance.

Finally, the Second Vatican Council, convened in 1962 and presumably to be concluded in 1965 or 1966, thus far has enabled the Pope to promulgate three major dogmatic decrees: On the Liturgy, On Ecumenism, and On the Church. In a totally different world, Vatican II is the fulfillment of Vatican I. Almost inevitably Vatican II's long-range significance will be assessed in terms of its central emphasis upon the church—upon its worship, its mission, and its relation to all those outside the boundaries of Roman Catholicism.

Thus a century of councils (1869-1965, and this near-century is open-ended!) comes into focus. Each council relates strikingly to a growing understanding of the church, its place in the purpose of God, its mission, and its unity. To many these councils may seem altogether unrelated. Yet even now to the eye of faith attempting to discern the signs of the times, the question arises: "In the providence of God, may not these councils and the whole complex of dynamic events they symbolize have a hidden unity?" The writer believes they do.

Another "century of councils" comes to mind. Its events have a solid and familiar ring: Nicea, 325; Constantinople, 381; Ephesus, 431; and Chalcedon, 451. When the gospel emerged from the soil of Palestine into the Graeco-Roman

world, rich in philosophies and religions, Christians had to clarify for themselves and for that world their understanding of God and of him whom they had proclaimed as Son of God and Savior. Through those councils in the first century of the Constantinian era, Christianity enunciated its doctrine of the Holy Trinity and of the Person of Jesus Christ.

Some 1,600 years later, and in the first century of the post-Constantinian era, Christians are having to clarify for themselves and for the world in which they live their understanding of the church. That process is being accomplished through councils. This is the century of the doctrine of the church—of the church in the world and for the world.

II. The Demise of Christendom— An Attempt at Perspective

In the first three centuries of its life, the church was a tiny minority, illegal and often persecuted, in a pluralistic culture. It knew that it lived its life in mission, in outreach to men everywhere. It planted the faith in cities—centers of commerce and transport, not the industrialized complexes of this century—and watched it spread slowly into the countryside.

With the emergence of Constantine early in the fourth century, the age of the Christian empire suddenly arrived. Almost overnight the churches were filled. With nearly everyone in the church, what need was there for mission? Congregations of new and nominal Christians lost the dynamic of corporate life lived in outreach and service. Instead, they became established bodies *served* by a priest. Constantinian Christendom's inversion of the true meaning of the congregation as the apostolic *ekklesia* took firm root. The state supported the church and sought the benefits of a Christian society. In the process, the emperor had to convene each of the four great ecumenical councils with the hope that theological agreement would also facilitate political unity.

With the removal of the capital to Constantinople and with the fall of Rome, the church in the West entered a new era of its life. Largely freed from the control of

the far-off emperor, the Bishop of Rome became the most powerful figure in the West. The Western church through its bishops and monks tutored the barbarians, from the ruins of the Empire created a new society, and largely dominated "the world." In an agrarian culture, the parish church became the place for worship and for the infusion of grace.

Europe was won to the church through missionary outreach. Sponsored by the Pope, supported by the prince, served by the monks, the missions were conducted quite apart from existing parish life. In that "Christian society" parish churches invited men to worship. What lay beyond the edges of their world was the responsibility of the Pope and of the monastic orders.

The process by which the church gained supremacy over the state, with its appeal to the doctrine of the Two Swords and begun in Gregory the Great, culminated early in the thirteenth century in the papal theocracy of Innocent III. Even then, the "Christian society" of Western Europe—Christendom, as commonly used—displayed a unity at the top but was atomized at the bottom.

The actual state of life in the grass roots parish was such that it usually depresses the honest historian. The Crusades were, so it seemed, a necessary diverting from Christian soil of warlike tendencies.

The Protestant Reformation occurred within European Christendom. The transnational papal theocracy, as seen under Innocent III, had long since collapsed; but in a period of growing nationalism, the Reformation churches maintained, among others, one basic notion of Christendom, namely, that a nation or principality has one church supported by the government. Thus they furthered the rise of national churches.

The Reformation brought a theological revolution. The Word of God as contained in the Scriptures became authoritative for faith, and faith alone sufficed for salvation. The priesthood of all believers and the doctrine of vocation pointed to a new kind of Christian responsibility. The church found embodiment in the congregation in which the Word is rightly preached and the sacraments are duly adminis-

tered. Congregational life was transformed, but the pre-Constantinian understanding of mission—germinally present in doctrine—was not regained. Reformation congregations were still part of Constantinian Christendom, and they retained the old parish notions. They were part of Europe's Christian society, and outreach was unnecessary. They had their needs served by a pastor or priest. The local churches of the Reformation, despite their revitalization, continued to be turned inward and remained largely self-serving.

By the middle of the sixteenth century the Roman Catholic Church had developed extensive missions in the New World and in Asia. Yet in rejecting the papacy and monasticism, Protestantism rejected the known and operating missionary structures until the nineteenth century and after Carey's departure in 1793 for India.

By no means the first Protestant missionary, William Carey nevertheless launched the modern missionary movement. His call for volunteers reverberated through an England transformed by the Evangelical Revival. Recruits came, and there was created the voluntary missionary society, the enabling structure of the modern missionary movement.

In its geographic and demographic survey of the world, Carey's *An Enquiry* made it startlingly clear—and it had always been so—that Christians in Europe constituted a minority among all the world's people. The great majority of mankind had never heard of Jesus Christ. Christendom's minority, the former cobbler declared, bore the obligation to grasp the meaning of sheer numbers and, under God, to penetrate the world bearing the Good News. No romantic escapist, Carey recognized the need of multitudes of the unconverted at home. He spoke not once of "foreign missions," but only of the one mission entrusted to the church. His total plan called for a mission in England and, with the remaining funds, for missions overseas.

In Carey's wake the modern missionary enterprise emerged. Its accomplishments are many and familiar, but four contributions are worth noting here:

First, it became the human agency for planting the church among every people and creating a world Christian community.

Second, it proclaimed that under God the Christian church, even in Christendom, participates in a mission of worldwide dimension.

Third, it demonstrated that each congregation has a direct responsibility for and is directly involved in the mission of God.

Fourth, by confronting the church in Christendom with accomplished missions, it helped that church to discover mission.

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For the purposes of this study the notion of Christendom, so recently buried, requires further probing. Often interpreted to mean that the European masses were Christian, the idea was just as specious and faulty under Innocent III as in Calvin's Geneva which itself had to pass laws to force people into the churches. In the eighteenth century widespread revulsion at Christendom's wars of religion on the Continent and in Britain reinforced a growing conviction that Christian faith was no longer a claim to fight about or die for. Other and "secular" values, it was widely thought, held greater worth than religion. What was regarded as Europe's "Christian society" was being steadily eroded. Then the Industrial Revolution, a growing belief in religious freedom for the individual, and other forces hastened the separation of Europe's industrial working classes and many of the intelligentsia from the churches. But the Constantinian alliance of church and state seemed to hide all this. Even while nineteenth century foreign missions flourished—their support came not from the churches but from committed individuals in voluntary societies outside official church structures—the shell of Christendom was progressively drained of those it claimed but had never won.

The true inner state of nineteenth century European Christendom was reflected in the nineteenth century's largest new nation, the United States of America. At its founding many of its states, repeating the Constantinian pattern, had their established churches. But in 1789 the first article in the Bill of Rights declared the separation of

church and state, and the several remaining establishments soon disappeared. America was settled by those who had emigrated from European Christendom, but in 1789 only 6 per cent of those in the population were church members. Theirs was not a birth-right but a voluntary membership, requiring personal commitment and financial contributions. In short, freed from the Constantinian church-state relation, the American churches—numerically and in what their immediate mission was seen to be—stood in 1789 in a situation comparable to that in which the European churches awoke to find themselves in 1945 with a "real" or communicating membership numbering only from 5 per cent to 10 per cent of the population.

In the 175 years between 1789 and 1964 voluntary church membership (as one measure of Christian commitment) in the United States of America steadily increased from 6 per cent to 56 per cent. Those statistics and their related history suggest several observations on the meaning of the growth of the church in America. (1) In a post-Constantinian setting, it represents largely the fruit of a mission to emigrés from Christendom's heartland. (2) It stands as the "Great Century's" most widespread "mass movement," one which also produced the consequent problems of dilution and syncretism. (3) It provides a uniquely instructive example of mission, neither Asian nor European but more nearly "younger church" than "older church"—free minority churches in a pluralistic society.² (4) It offers an accurate measure of the unreality of Europe's self-assessment as Christendom even at the time of its nineteenth century missionary outreach.

In the two decades since the end of World War II, the political configuration of the globe has changed. The world has become physically one and continues to shrink in size. In the realms of technology, science, history, economics, and politics, mankind has entered the ecumenical era. Universal cultural interpenetration points to the birth of a world civilization. The Chris-

²Cf. K. S. Latourette, *A History of the Expansion of Christianity*, Vol. IV (New York: Harper, 1941) pp. 9-109, 175ff. See also Franklin H. Littell, *From State Church to Pluralism* (New York: Doubleday Anchor Books, 1962).

tian church, with the Ecumenical Movement its most notable hallmark, enters this era also itself often speaking of "the post-Christian age." That phrase gained currency at the close of World War II, and the realities to which it points were made vividly clear in Hendrik Kraemer's *Christian Message in a Non-Christian World* (1938) and were factually outlined in the Anglican Report, *Towards the Conversion of England* (1945) and Abbe Henri Godin's *France Pagan? (La France, Pays de Mission? 1943)*.

The notion of the "post-Christian Age" (much more precisely but awkwardly, "post-Constantinian" or "post-Christendom") has become entrenched, and the inaccuracy of the phrase plagues much current thought. Christians are seen to be a minority in Europe—as if a new situation had suddenly arisen—and throughout the world. New recognition of an old reality in Europe has led many there and in Asia and Africa to judge that the Christian gospel has been tried and found wanting—an outlook not unlike that held by the old Romans after the fall of Rome and against which Augustine wrote his *City of God*.

The church throughout the world lives today in an environment more nearly like that of its pre-Constantinian period than it has known for more than sixteen centuries. Everywhere a minority (although claiming one-third of mankind and being the largest religious community in the world), often persecuted, in some areas illegal, the church now sees itself living only on its God-given resources. Yet for the church the post-Constantinian age differs from the pre-Constantinian in at least two important respects. (1) Then it was a minority throughout the Mediterranean society. Now it is a minority planted throughout the whole world. (2) Then it had never been dominant among any people. Now, it is widely judged to be a cultural and ethnic religion whose day has passed.

By way of summary: from the perspective of ecumenical history—true world history, mankind still lives in a pre-Christian age. Christians have always been and continue to be a minority. Yet the

whole world today is influenced more than ever by forces which have their ultimate rootage in the gospel. From the perspective of Western history, this is a post-Christendom and post-Constantinian age. State support, favor, and advocacy for the church in the main have vanished along with massive shaping influence in society. From the perspective of contemporary popular understanding, formed by facile images and unexamined slogans, this is in East and West a post-Christian age. Inadequate as that phrase may be, its wide usage and assumed validity confront the church with an important datum for mission. New thrusts in mission thus involve adequately assessing three realities: the pre-Christian, the post-Christendom, and the post-Christian.

III. Two Contemporary Doctrines of the Church

From the missionary movement of the past 175 years have come the newer churches in Asia, the Pacific, Africa, and Latin America. They, in turn, in recent decades have produced some notable church unions, and in the process have been reformulating the doctrine of the church.

A comparison of the self-understanding of these churches with those that were new in sixteenth century Europe, produces a striking contrast. The Reformation churches were part of Christendom and saw no Biblical or theological warrant for outreach beyond Christendom. Each understood itself chiefly through those elements which differentiated it from the other churches of Christendom. But the new united churches of Asia and Africa have defined themselves primarily by that which is common to all—their mission! And this mission is precisely that which has led to their unity.

A. *The Church of South India* (CSI), formed in 1947, is the best known of these united churches. What is said here about it could be applied also, with minor variations, to the other united churches in the non-Western world.

In *The Constitution of the CSI*, following the name of the new church and the list of its constituting bodies, the first paragraph of

the theological substance on the first page begins:

II.2. The Purpose and Nature of the Union. The Church of South India affirms that the purpose of the union by which it has been formed is the carrying out of God's will, as it is expressed in our Lord's prayer—"That they may all be one. . . that the world may believe that Thou didst send me."

Further on one reads:

II.3. . . . Therefore the Church of South India purposes ever to be mindful of its missionary calling; and prays that it may not only be greatly used of God for the evangelization of South India, but may also take its due share in the preaching of the Gospel and the building up of Christ's Church in other parts of the world.

The whole constitution develops this understanding that the CSI has been called in mission to live its life on behalf of the world.

When, for example, the CSI in its *Constitution* turns to the ministry, it begins with the ministry entrusted by God to the entire church for the sake of the world and only then moves to the vocation of the ordained ministry.

Enough has been indicated to suggest that in its official theology the CSI projects a new understanding of the church. The essential nature of the church, it affirms, involves mission made meaningful in visible unity.

B. *The Roman Catholic Church*. As one ponders the meaning of this new ecclesiology, there comes the realization that the largest and oldest Christian community in the Western European tradition has just promulgated its first dogmatic decree on the church. The towering importance of this fact—that Rome has formulated its first full-orbed dogma of the church in the contemporary period—must be fully grasped. Forged in the post-Christendom age and in the ecumenical era, it too reflects a new conception. In *De Ecclesia* the Roman Catholic Church has set forth its self-understanding in the context of mission.

De Ecclesia's introduction begins:

Christ is the Light of nations. Because this is so, this sacred

synod gathered together in the Holy Spirit eagerly desires, by proclaiming the Gospel to every creature (cf. Mk. 16:15) to bring the light of Christ to all men . . . [The Church] desires now to unfold more fully to the faithful of the Church and to the whole world its own inner nature and universal mission. (Para. 1)

Further on this dogmatic decree states:

The obligation of spreading the faith is imposed on every disciple of Christ, according to his state . . . that the entire world may become the People of God. (Para. 17)

In the section on "The Laity" one reads:

The lay apostolate . . . is a participation in the salvific mission of the Church itself. . . . The laity are called in a special way to make the Church present and operative in those places and circumstances where only through them can it become the salt of the earth. . . . Thus every layman . . . is at the same time a witness and a living instrument of the mission of the Church . . . [and has] the noble duty of working to extend the divine plan of salvation to all men of each epoch and in every land. . . . Even when preoccupied with temporal cares, the laity can and must perform a work of great value for the evangelization of the world. (Paras. 33-35)

In studying *De Ecclesia*, the Protestant, without affirming the sections on infallibility and on Mary will understand the reasons for their inclusion. Yet his dominant impression may well be that here is a theological definition of the church basically conceived as God's mission in the world.

For centuries to come, *De Ecclesia* will be theologically determinative for Roman Catholic life, outreach, and experiment in mission.⁸ The listing of its chapter titles may indicate further something of its nature and thrust.

- I. The Mystery of the Church
- II. On the People of God
- III. On the Hierarchical Structure . . . And . . . On the Episcopate

⁸ The projected schema on missions of necessity will be derivative from *De Ecclesia*.

IV. The Laity

V. The Universal Call to Holiness in the Church

VI. The Religious

VII. Eschatological Nature of the Pilgrim Church . . .

VIII. The Blessed Virgin Mary, Mother of God, In the Mystery of Christ and the Church

* * * * *

Here are two new formulations of the doctrine of the church. They derive from two bodies totally different in history, size, and outreach. Yet at certain points of basic awareness and orientation they demonstrate a remarkably similar conviction about the missionary nature of the church. They are included here because all new thrusts in mission spring from response to an understanding of God's purpose for his covenanted people, the church. These two statements exemplify a new and basic theological thrust in mission.

IV. Developments Within the Larger Ecumenical Structures

From this point onward in the survey it becomes difficult to categorize new thrusts. They will be listed in what seems to be their area of most direct applicability.

A. *Councils* constitute a major portion of the ecumenical structure and operate at the local, intermediate, national, regional (international), and world levels. In the degree to which councils do for denominations what denominations cannot do alone, they point to the incompleteness of the denominational church and to their own participation, in some measure, in the nature of the church.⁴

Councils have stimulated and launched numerous new thrusts in mission. Moreover, new councils meeting new needs emerge with regularity. One development worth noting is the occasional evolution in title, structure, and function from a basically Protestant and missionary Christian Council to a Council of Churches. This occurred in the Philippines in 1963 and in the Near East in 1964. Each action enlarged the council's constituency

⁴ Cf., *The Ecclesiological Significance of Councils of Churches* (New York: National Council of Churches, 1963).

to include non-Protestant churches. The Near East Council's current project to produce a Greek-Arabic Lexicon and a new translation of the Bible has brought the most diverse groups—from Southern Baptist to Roman Catholic (and with varied degrees of relationship)—into a sense of common cause.

B. *The World Council of Churches'* integrating of the International Missionary Council (IMC) at the Third Assembly in New Delhi, 1961, must be viewed as one of the important recent events in the theology and life of the Christian mission. Here was embodied acknowledgment by member churches that mission is of the very essence of the church. For the great European churches lacking, with one or two exceptions, any integral mission board or agency, the step was of special significance and became another evidence that the Constantinian era's separation of church and mission is theologically and practically indefensible.

Integration has proved meaningful to the Orthodox, and they in turn have contributed to the Commission on World Mission and Evangelism (CWME, formerly IMC). Integration has also simplified and strengthened ecumenical ties in Asia, Africa, and to some degree in Latin America. The new alignment has also helped to clarify the distinguishable but inseparable relationship between mission and service as part of the church's witness.⁵ The IMC had been involved in both and the WCC "formally" only in the latter. The fuller implications of this integration are yet to be unfolded.

Two developments related to all that New Delhi represented for mission require noting:

1. *The Six Continent View of Mission.* The crumbling of the "Christendom complex," which sees mission almost exclusively as outreach from the Western churches to Asia, Africa, and Latin America

⁵ An analogous situation is seen in the recent change in structure and name in the former Division of Foreign Missions of the NCCCUSA. Determined to embody and symbolize a unified mission of witness and service, while ridding itself of the word "Foreign," the DFM, integrating Church World Service, since January, 1965, has been The Division of Overseas Ministries of the NCCCUSA. See *Annual Report, 1964, Division of Foreign Missions* (New York: National Council of Churches, 1965), pp. 29-30.

(a "three continent view"), and fresh recognition that the church everywhere is in mission have given rise to the phrase, "Mission to six continents." This "slogan" points vividly to a new perspective and policy orientation.⁶

Inevitably, the size and resources of the Western churches relative to those elsewhere preclude dramatic shifts of the kind dear to news reporters. Yet the channeling through the WCC of funds from churches overseas into the "Mississippi Delta Project" provides a salutary and instructive reminder of what is involved. What at the moment may appear less dramatic, but which involves the churches in many more areas, are those experiments in congregational renewal and outreach now seen on every continent. The "Six Continent View" has already caused the *International Review of Missions* to revise its policy of coverage. The outworking of the implications of this basic reorientation for boards of national and overseas missions will bear watching.

2. *Joint Action for Mission.* In its "Message" the Lund Conference, 1952, on Faith and Order pointedly, but modestly in the form of a question, urged the churches "to act together in all matters except those in which deep differences of conviction compel them to act separately." The Third Assembly of the WCC at New Delhi, 1961, in its "Message" urged the churches to "find out the things which in each place we can do together now; and faithfully do them, praying and working always for that fuller unity which Christ wills for his Church."

Whitby's "Partnership in Obedience" (1947), Willigen's "Mobility" (1952), Ghana's "The Christian world mission is Christ's, not ours" (1958), and New Delhi's "All in each place" (1961) lie behind Joint Action for Mission (JAM). That program represents the determination that what the missionary agencies of the churches for so long have known and been saying shall be made flesh and blood in common action. In referring to IMC policy-suggestions and the use made of

them, John R. Mott in 1947 said, "Our greatest weakness has been the failure to move from knowledge to action." JAM is an attempt to overcome that criticism by putting existing theory and expressed conviction into creative practice.

JAM is not bare interdenominational action. It represents the determination that in a given geographical area, Christians shall explore together the best approach to their evident task in mission and then proceed to act to meet it as the one people of God in that place. Whether it involves boards, local churches, or both, JAM requires rethinking the witness traditionally given or now needed, willingness to abandon any forms now irrelevant to the need, possible redeployment of resources, and openness to new ventures with no denominational gain.

JAM was enunciated in 1961 at New Delhi and there was authorized as a CWME policy. Explored in 1963 in three EACC "Situation Conferences" in India, Singapore, and Japan, JAM was reexamined at Mexico City in 1963. Although JAM raises major issues (e.g. church union, denominational conscience, the church home for new converts, etc.), it appears to have the support of many mission boards and of agencies such as the Division of Overseas Ministries.⁷ The EACC in its entirety appears to be one possible embodiment of JAM.

The London Secretary of the CWME, R. K. Orchard, wrote in the January, 1965, *International Review of Missions* that he knew of no instance of JAM in "full operation," but in several significant situations steps are being taken for major JAM endeavors. Taiwan is a case in point. There Presbyte-

rians, Anglicans, Methodists, and Lutherans are moving toward JAM on a large scale.

C. *The Second Meeting of the Commission on World Mission and Evangelism* in Mexico City, December, 1963, without attempting to survey the full range of its concerns and responsibilities, nevertheless, produced four major "Section Reports." Their titles, which point toward "new thrusts," are:

- I. The Witness of Christians to Men of Other Faiths
- II. The Witness of Christians to Men in the Secular World
- III. The Witness of the Congregation in its Neighborhood
- IV. The Witness of the Christian Church across National and Confessional Boundaries

For Mexico City, 1963, "Mission in six continents" undoubtedly will become its symbolic phrase and "Joint Action for Mission" its distinguishing program-policy.⁸

D. *Regional Councils.* Since 1957 regional ecumenical bodies have appeared and are growing in importance. At least four new bodies have emerged: The East Asia Christian Conference (EACC, 1957 and constituted in 1959), The All-Africa Conference of Churches (AACC, 1958 and constituted in 1963), The Provisional Committee for the Pacific Churches' Conference (resulting from the Samoa Conference, 1961), and the European Conference of Churches (1964). The Near East Council of Churches (1964) grew out of the old Near East Christian Council. In Latin America serious discussion looking toward a council for that region is already underway, and a preliminary draft of a constitution may be circulated by late 1965.

The EACC, the most fully developed of these new bodies, has had three Assemblies (Prapat, 1957; Kuala Lumpur, 1959; and Bangkok, 1964) and brings together churches within the area bounded by the Karachi-Sydney-Tokyo triangle. Born and continued in the conviction that "the purpose of God for the churches in East Asia is life together in a common obedience to Him for the doing of his will in

⁶ Cf., R. K. Orchard, ed., *Witness in Six Continents: Records of the Meeting of the Commission on World Mission and Evangelism of the World Council of Churches held in Mexico City, December 8th to 19th, 1963.* (London: Edinburgh House Press, 1964)

⁷ W. A. Visser 't Hooft, ed., *The New Delhi Report: The Third Assembly of the World Council of Churches, 1961* (New York: Association Press, 1962), pp. 251-2. *Minutes of the Assembly of the IMC . . . and of the First Meeting of the Commission on World Mission and Evangelism of the WCC, Dec. 7-8, 1961, at New Delhi* (Geneva: Commission on World Mission and Evangelism, 1962), pp. 31-2, 87-9. *Minutes of the Second Meeting of the Commission on World Mission and Evangelism, Mexico City, Dec. 8th to 9th, 1963* (Geneva: Commission on World Mission and Evangelism, 1964), pp. 58-62. *Reports of Situation Conferences Convened by the East Asia Christian Conference, February-March, 1963* (Distributed by the Commission on World Mission and Evangelism of the World Council of Churches, 475 Riverside Drive, New York, N. Y. 10027). R. K. Orchard, "Joint Action for Mission—Its Aim, Implications, and Method," *International Review of Missions*, (Vol. LIV, No. 213), January, 1965, pp. 81-94.

⁸ *Witness in Six Continents*, op. cit., pp. 144-178.

the world. . .”⁹ the EACC represents a significant new thrust in mission and unity.

Doing in Asia what neither a national council of churches nor the WCC can do, EACC meets a new and important need. Among its member churches it has stimulated stewardship and the sending of Asian missionaries. It convenes special consultations on common concerns in mission which range from urban and industrial evangelism to home and family life. Despite the scope of its interests, the conferences it sponsors, and the considerable work it does (as reflected in the large and substantial contents of its Assembly Minutes,¹⁰) the EACC is completely decentralized. It has no headquarters building. There is no central EACC file. Its secretaries and committee chairmen are found in all parts of Asia. “This,” says D. T. Niles, the EACC’s General Secretary, with a twinkle, “is the Asian way.” The chief impact of the EACC to date has been to give the Asian churches a sense of their common responsibility for the Christian mission in Asia.

The All-Africa Church Conference has similar interests and purposes. Despite its youth, it has had to respond vigorously in thought, action, and structure to help shape the response of the African churches to the burgeoning needs and opportunities thrust at them from every part of their revolutionary continent.¹¹

E. Protestant-Roman Catholic-Orthodox Discussions and Relations. One could fill pages with instances since 1961 of Protestant-Roman Catholic evidences of fraternity at the local level. At another level, that of the discussion of specialists, developments thus far

are modest but worth noting. For the first time—as one thinks of the CWME representing a continuing line with the old International Missionary Council—Orthodox churchmen were present as members of the CWME at Mexico City in 1963, and Roman Catholics were present as observers. Early in 1965 the WCC created a “Working Group” to confer from time to time with representatives of the Vatican’s Secretariat for Christian Unity. Earlier this year the former Secretary of the Methodist Board, Eugene Smith, now Executive Secretary for the WCC’s staff in the USA, prepared a report, “Missionary Developments: WCC Member Churches, 1960-1965,” for the first meeting on missionary questions between representatives of the Roman Catholic Church and of the WCC. Limited as they are, these initial evidences point toward new developments of future promise.

V. Developments Related to the “Local” Church

Several new major thrusts in the theology and life of the Christian mission relate primarily to the local church or to a church within a region. These reflect the new conviction that mission constitutes the church rather than that missions are an activity conducted by one part of the church’s organization.

A. *The Rediscovery of the Laity*. Out of the experiences of World War II and the remarkable contributions of laymen in making real the witness of the church, the WCC at Amsterdam in 1948 reminded everyone—almost, it seemed, to its own surprise—that the laity constitutes more than 99 per cent of the church! In the postwar world the laity has begun to come into focus. Yves Congar’s *Lay People in the Church*¹² on the Roman Catholic side and Hendrik Kraemer’s *A Theology of the Laity*¹³ on the Protestant side marked major stages in this “rediscovery.” Congar speaks of the laity as always “a subordinate order in the church.” But Kraemer insists that the true Biblical conception is of the whole church as *laos* (laity, people of

God) and “a royal priesthood.” For Protestants Kraemer’s book is germinal and revolutionary. It raises the fundamental question of whether the church is mission or has missions. For Kraemer the church is the people of God living in mission and service. The WCC’s Department of The Laity, Hans-Ruedi Weber’s *Salty Christians*,¹⁴ and Paul Löffler’s *The Layman Abroad in the Mission of the Church*¹⁵ all reflect this new thrust in basic missionary understanding. As Kraemer pointedly suggests, the laity must be seen to be of at least equal importance with the clergy in any Faith and Order discussion on the church.

B. *Structures for a Missionary Congregation*. Kraemer speaks of the laity as the church’s “frozen assets” and points to the need for the radical restructuring of congregations if the people of God are to be able to understand themselves and fulfill their calling to mission and service. From Evanston had come a similar word, and at New Delhi the WCC’s Department on Studies in Evangelism was authorized to launch a study on “The Missionary Structure of the Congregation,”¹⁶ a theme proposed by D. T. Niles.

Striking experiments from several lands had already underscored the basic need on the local level and suggested the wisdom of a widespread coordinated endeavor. On the Roman Catholic side, for example, Abbé Georges Michonneau’s *Revolution in a City Parish*¹⁷ detailed Roman Catholic congregational renewal in an urban-industrial setting, and on the Protestant side the East Harlem Protestant Parish in New York, already well known, found vivid interpretation in George W. Webber’s *God’s Colony in Man’s World*.¹⁸

¹⁴ Greenwich, Conn.: Seabury Press, 1963.

¹⁵ London: Edinburgh House Press, 1962.

¹⁶ *The New Delhi Report*, 1961, *op. cit.*, pp. 189-191.

¹⁷ London: Blackfrairs Publications, 1957. Published first in Paris in 1946, the original bore a title more accurately translated, *The Parish—a Revolutionary Community*.

¹⁸ New York: Abingdon Press, 1960. See also Webber’s *The Congregation in Mission: Emerging Structures for the Church in an Urban Society* (New York: Abingdon Press, 1964) and its bibliography which lists some of the many titles in this area. The latest is Wallace E. Fisher’s *From Tradition to Mission* (New York: Abingdon Press, 1965) which traces the metamorphosis of an old Lutheran city church into a new center of mission vitality.

⁹ East Asia Christian Conference, Constitution: Preamble.

¹⁰ The most recent were printed in two parts: *Assembly of the East Asia Christian Conference . . . Bangkok . . . 1964* (Available from U Kyaw Than, 14 Pramauan Road, Bangkok, Thailand), which without including a single speech, details the work of the Assembly in 175 pages; and *The Christian Community within the Human Community* (Available from M. M. Thomas, 19 Millers Road, Bangalore 6, India) which, in 84 pages, sets forth the main thrust of the East Asia Christian Conference for the next quadrennium.

¹¹ *The Church in Changing Africa: Report of the All-Africa Church Conference held at Ibadan, January 10-19, 1968* (New York: International Missionary Council, 1958) and *Drumbeats from Kampala: Report of the First Assembly of the All-Africa Conference of Churches held at Kampala, April 20 to April 30, 1965* (London: United Society for Christian Literature, 1963).

¹² Trans., Donald Attwater (Westminster, Md.: Newman Press, 1957), French edition in 1953.

¹³ Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1958.

This WCC-initiated project is well advanced in many parts of the world, and several studies will soon be published. Three already have appeared. Colin Williams, Director of the NCCUSA's Department of Evangelism and Chairman of the comparable department in the WCC, has written two study books, *Where in the World? Changing Forms of the Church's Witness*¹⁹ and *What in the World?*²⁰ widely used in American churches. John Fleming has edited the EACC's contribution, *Structures for a Missionary Congregation*.²¹

In essence these studies assert that God's purpose for his people must determine the form of their congregational life. Any form or pattern of local church life, (no matter how functional it may once have been) which thwarts the outreach of God's people into the social structures that shape the lives of men today negates the apostolate of the church.

C. *New Forms of the Ministry.* New forms of ministry and service among laymen, fresh, creative forms of congregational life, and related Biblical studies raise certain fundamental questions concerning the ministries of the church. "Is the paid professional ministry the norm by which all other forms of ministry are to be measured?" "Is traditional church order constitutive or essentially functional for the people of God?" "Is the unpaid clergyman who earns his living through secular work a temporary expedient for 'poorer' Asian and African—and even American—churches?" The American Protestant response to this last is almost unanimous until the example of many of the rural Orthodox clergy in Greece is examined and the results of certain recent studies are pursued. "Does ordination confer authority to be the church or to act on behalf of the people of God?" "Are unusual patterns of ministry from the first centuries acceptable today?" "Is the Holy Spirit free to bring forth new patterns of ministry in our time?"

These questions have their own urgency for congregations in Rio's slums, in India's rural areas, in Chicago's apartment section, or in Los Alamos. They are rising with increasing frequency. A substantial body of data on experience in "experimental forms" of the ministry already exists.²² Exploration of the present and possible future significance of forms of the ministry quite different from that of the traditional salaried clergyman looms importantly for mission in the immediate future. The possible implications for Faith and Order are exciting to contemplate.

VI. Some Larger Concerns

This section alone could be expanded to book length, but of necessity it must be concentrated. The specific larger concerns which have invited new missionary thrusts are many. Everywhere there are human needs and changed situations that call for new thrusts in mission—the refugees, the world of the university, the population explosion, the revolution in family life around the world, education in an age when nation states are concerned with the welfare of their citizens and make universal education a prime priority, Christian medical service, mass communications, and theological education.

Other important areas with new thrusts could be cited, but two must be singled out for special mention.

A. *The Christian Involvement in Society.* The gospel relates to the whole human race, to the created world, and to history. It proclaims God's love and holiness as well as his sovereignty. In God's world today human societies are changing rapidly—everywhere. In the constantly new structures of society the church must be present through the people of God, individually and corporately, making visible in life the meaning of the gospel in the midst of the communities where men live. This involves "the Christian presence" and Christian participation in nation building, community development, industrial

life, and in other enterprises.²³

Obviously, the circumstances of Christian involvement in society are as vast, varied, and complex as the world itself. The possibilities open to Protestants in Spain, to the Orthodox in Russia, and to Christians in China vary markedly from those open to Christians in Brazil, the United States of America, Nigeria, and India.

In the present emerging world civilization the universal pattern of urbanization and industrialization, with all the attendant upheavals and tensions involved, poses a major challenge to Christian mission. In the United States, in Africa, in India, in Latin America—everywhere urbanization proceeds rapidly. In many Latin American countries, for example, the chief city may hold from 20 per cent to 33 per cent of the nation's population. In India and Africa cities of 200,000 people are springing up almost overnight where a new steel mill or harbor has been built. Men are moving from the land to cities for work and for the experience of a new life. Industrialization also stands out as a prime hallmark of our civilization. Real differences are to be seen as between Detroit and Hong Kong or Durgapur and Mombasa, but the basic problem—complex in which industrialization involves the individual and society is everywhere the same.

EACC and AACC conferences on the meaning of Christian mission in urban-industrial centers and the similar probing concern and effort of churches and boards in the West mark the growing urban-industrial complexion of our age as an area for thoughtful, urgent, and massive new thrust. What the Industrial Revolution wrought in and for Europe's Christendom, the universal urban-industrial revolution is repeating in the areas of the traditional non-Christian religions and in Latin America. This challenge to Christian mission is only beginning to be grasped.

Similarly, racial conflict—whether in India, Malaysia, Britain, the USA, East Africa, South Africa or elsewhere—as a concomitant of the present age has often found its

¹⁹ New York: National Council of Churches, 1963.

²⁰ New York: National Council of Churches, 1964.

²¹ Singapore: East Asia Christian Conference, 1964. Available from Dr. Fleming at 6 Mt. Sophia Road, Singapore 9, Malaysia.

²² A *Tent-Making Ministry: Towards a More Flexible Form of Ministry* (Geneva: DWME, 1962). David M. Paton, ed., *New Forms of Ministry* (London: Edinburg House Press, 1965. CWME Research pamphlets, No. 12).

²³ Cf., P. D. Devanandan and M. M. Thomas, eds., *Christian Participation in Nation Building* (Bangalore, India: National Christian Council of India and the Christian Institute for the Study of Religion and Society, 1960).

context within the larger revolution among mankind's peoples. The Christian presence in its constructive and reconciling form (and the converse, one adds sadly) in the racial upheavals of the present day makes a witness watched and weighed in every part of the globe. Fortright and creative relationships amidst this turmoil represent one of the most decisive opportunities for obedient witness open to Christians in their mission.

New thrusts in mission, as indicated above and reflecting the Christian involvement in society, testifying that the gospel relates to creation, to the orders of life, and to the structures of society and that "all things" are caught up in and find their fulfillment in him. "For God so loved the world . . ."

B. Christian Encounter with Other Religions. A most distinctive feature of the emerging world civilization is the encounter among the religions. Still not recognized by many, this encounter will loom steadily larger for as far ahead as man can see. Its challenge to the whole range of Christian faith and its demand for the most fundamental, sensitive, dedicated, and creative thought and life in mission should be obvious.

Much has been written about the resurgence among the traditional religions of mankind,²⁴ but the question remains, in Max Warren's words, "Resurgence or Renais-

²⁴ Perhaps significantly almost nothing is said about the serious decline or death of several once important faith-systems such as Confucianism, Taoism, Shamanism, certain forms of Buddhism, and African Traditional Religion.

sance?" Yet in recent times two other great "world religions" have arisen: Communism and Secularism, and for both a case can be made for their being "Christian heresies." These two are seldom mentioned among the resurgent religions, but Communism, with its messianic and missionary zeal, and Secularism, universally felt and with its subtly quiet shaping of men's world view and ultimate allegiances, are massive participants in the encounter.

Many new thrusts in mission relating to this encounter can be cited. Among them are such creative agencies as the Christian Institute for the Study of Religion and Society in Bangalore, India, (and the Roman Catholic equivalent in Poona) and similar centers in Hong Kong, Japan, and elsewhere; "The Christian Presence Series" (with perhaps the most notable cluster of books being those from Canon Kenneth Cragg, only one of which, strictly speaking, is part of the "Series"); the Lay Academy Movement around the world (Admittedly, "encounter of religions" is not the category in which such are usually placed, but for those in Japan the encounter with Secularism, Communism, and Buddhism looms large and for those in Germany the encounter is not greatly different.); the Islam in Africa Project; and numerous studies and consultations.

The contemporary world has raised large and troubling questions for those in the church concerning the place of their faith among the

world's religions. Moreover, much current theological thought—including the rediscovery that the church is mission, which, with the reception of its amazing implications for the congregation's immediate outreach, has blinded many to the worldwide dimensions of God's mission—frequently suggests to Christians a view of mission not unlike that of ancient Israel's ingrown "centripetal understanding" of its role. Among Christians especially in the West, such considerations have created major uncertainty about mission. Indeed, a member of the Vatican's Secretariat for Christian Unity, speaking of Vatican II and the temper of thinking within the Roman Catholic Church, in the writer's presence said, ". . . and there is even uncertainty that we should be in mission." Such questioning, admittedly, has both positive and negative elements in it.

This is, and will increasingly become, an age of pluralism and of relativity. The meaning of mission as involving conversion is a pressing and growing problem. It has produced considerable fuzzy thinking but a little study in depth. It demands new attention.

Finally one is driven to the question asked initially in first century Palestine: "Who is Jesus Christ?" The most fundamental "new thrust" in the years ahead must relate directly to ever-new probing into the meaning of God's revelation in Jesus Christ for the people of the covenant and for God's whole creation.

THE AIM OF MISSION IN THE METHODIST CHURCH

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The Methodist Church defines the aim of missions today in much the same terms as those used by one of its parent bodies in 1928. The present statement, adopted by the Uniting Conference in 1939 and reaffirmed by each succeeding General Conference, is as follows:

"The supreme aim of missions is to make the Lord Jesus Christ known to all peoples in all lands as their divine Savior, to persuade

them to become his disciples, and to gather these disciples into Christian churches, to enlist them in the building of the Kingdom of God; to co-operate with these churches; to promote world Christian fellowship; and to bring to bear on all human life the spirit and principles of Christ."¹

¹ *Doctrines and Discipline of The Methodist Church*, 1964, par. 1176; 1939, par. 931.

Actually, this definition represents only a limited revision of the statement of the aim of foreign missions adopted by the Methodist Episcopal General Conference of 1928, and reiterated in 1932 and 1936:

"The supreme and controlling aim of Foreign Missions is to make the Lord Jesus Christ known to all men as their Divine Saviour, to persuade them to become his disci-

ples, and to gather these disciples into Christian Churches which shall be, under God, self-propagating, self-supporting, and self-governing; to co-operate so long as necessary with these churches in the evangelizing of their respective countries, and to bring to bear on all human life the spirit and principles of Christ."²

The deletion in 1939 of both the adjective *foreign* and the reference to the countries where new churches are founded was of course necessitated by the fact that the united Methodist church combined home and foreign missions under one Board of Missions and Church Extension, and the aim needed to be stated broadly enough to embrace all aspects of its work. It would be interesting to investigate the reasons for the other changes made by the Uniting Conference: the elimination of the specific assignment of autonomous responsibility to churches resulting from missionary work; the addition of enlistment in the building of the kingdom; and the inclusion of the promotion of universal Christian fellowship. However, such an inquiry would be outside the scope of the present paper. But the interested and concerned Methodist can hardly avoid wondering over his church's continued willingness to accept a definition which has remained unchanged since 1939, and in large measure since 1928.

This circumstance may be due to indifference toward formal statements of purpose, to traditional Methodist pragmatism, to unawareness of theological developments, or to a combination of these or other factors. Whatever the cause, the effectiveness of the church's missionary labors is bound to be handicapped if they are carried on without relation to aims which are Biblically and theologically grounded and realistically related to the world of today. During the past four decades new movements have profoundly altered the theological situation, and the world in which the gospel must be proclaimed has undergone radical

change. Hence a statement adopted 26 years ago and substantially formulated 11 years earlier can hardly be regarded by a living church as an adequate definition of its missionary purpose.

If The Methodist Church is to be a good steward in recruiting, training, and guiding missionaries for service in today's world, it must carefully reexamine the objectives of the mission to which it is called. This paper undertakes such a re-examination, though only in a preliminary way, in four stages: (1) a critique of the present formulation; (2) an inquiry into new cultural developments and theological emphases which might serve as guidelines for a possible reformulation; (3) suggestions concerning affirmations worthy of inclusion in a new definition; and (4) a tentative statement of aims as a starting-point for discussion.

I. The Present Statement

Our first task is to weigh the adequacy of the present statement of purpose, not for the newly united Methodist Church of 1939, but for today's church in today's world. In this process it may be helpful to see both the statement and our current situation in the light of the chief understandings of the missionary task held by the first Christian community. Six New Testament passages are particularly relevant, though representative of many others:

The Great Commission of Matt. 28:19-20: "Go therefore and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, teaching them to observe all that I have commanded you; and lo, I am with you always, to the close of the age."

The Lucan form of the commission (Acts 1:8): "You shall receive power when the Holy Spirit has come upon you; and you shall be my witnesses in Jerusalem and in all Judea and Samaria and to the end of the earth."

The Johannine commission: "Peace be with you. As the Father has sent me, even so I send you. . . . Receive the Holy Spirit" (John 20:21-22).

The eschatological interpretation

of the gospel and the kingdom represented by Matt. 24:14: "This gospel of the kingdom will be preached throughout the whole world, as a testimony to all nations; and then the end will come."

The Pauline stress on the ministry of reconciliation: "If any one is in Christ, he is a new creation; the old has passed away, behold, the new has come. All this is from God, who through Christ reconciled us to himself and gave us the ministry of reconciliation; that is, God was in Christ reconciling the world to himself, not counting their trespasses against them, and entrusting to us the message of reconciliation. So we are ambassadors for Christ, God making his appeal through us" (II Cor. 5:17-20).

The conception of the church and its mission in I Peter 2:9: "You are a chosen race, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, God's own people, that you may declare the wonderful deeds of him who called you out of darkness into his marvelous light."

In important respects the definition of 1939 is clearly in accord with such New Testament conceptions as those cited. (1) It affirms the responsibility of the church to bear witness to Jesus Christ in the entire world. (2) It accepts the goal of winning committed disciples. (3) It recognizes the importance of gathering converts into communities of baptized Christians. (4) It asserts the authority of the teachings of Jesus for the lives of his followers. (5) It reflects concern for the realization of Christian fellowship transcending national and denominational boundaries. (6) It assumes the obligation of every Christian to be an instrument in the coming of the kingdom of God.

However, several features of the declaration, especially certain omissions, make it less than adequate as a formulation of the aim of missionary endeavor for the church today.

1. Its focus on the plural term *missions* antedates the recognition recently gained that specific missionary activities are expressions of one underlying responsibility which permeates the entire life and work of the church. As the recipient of God's gift of himself in Jesus Christ, the church is called or sent to share with all men what

² *Doctrines and Discipline of The Methodist Episcopal Church*, 1928, par. 458. The M. E. Church adopted no statement of the aim of missions prior to 1928. The M. E. Church, South, which held its last General Conference in 1938, did not define the aim of its missionary endeavor.

it has received. By its very origin and nature the church is *mission*. If we focus attention on our sending, the fact of our being sent, our "sentness" or "commissionedness," we are more likely to keep central our relation to him who sends us, and thus to reach a deeper level of understanding and life. In dealing with basic aims it is therefore sounder to speak of the church's mission as a whole than of its manifold missions.

2. The definition manifests no clear awareness of the oneness or the wholeness of the church. Drafted before the searching Biblical and theological studies of the nature and mission of the church carried out during the past twenty-five years, it envisages gathering new disciples into churches, not into the total Church of Jesus Christ. Moreover, these churches are conceived as sufficiently separate from the sending body that the latter is portrayed as cooperating with them, not as being one with them. The formulation lacks the New Testament conception of the total *ekklesia*, the organic wholeness of the Body of Christ, the interdependent identity of the one people of God.

3. It overestimates the role of man in the coming of the kingdom of God. Though it properly recognizes the need for man's trustful and obedient acceptance of God's rule and his active commitment to the divine will, it does not make sufficiently plain that the kingdom is ultimately a divine gift, depending primarily on the initiative and activity of God. Man's part is actually more like the cultivation of a vineyard than the construction of a building. It is still more appropriately portrayed by Jesus' parable of the sower; men sow the seed and fertilize the soil but God brings his kingdom.

4. In general, the statement does not emphasize sufficiently the constant dependence of the missionary church on the redemptive, life-giving, transforming activity of God. The mission is first of all his; it is the work of one who acts through men of faith to reconcile the world to himself. The aim of the Great Commission of Matt. 28: 19-20, as suggested by its baptismal formula, is that of bringing men into a living relation to the triune

God. Similarly, Acts 1:8 roots the witness of the church in the empowerment of the Holy Spirit. The church's mission is of course directed to men in need of salvation, but it originates in and at every point depends on the saving action of God.

5. Lacking in the declaration is any recognition of the eschatological dimension of the Christian mission. It is emphatically and rightly concerned with the fulfillment of the will of God in man's earthly life, but it fails to place this endeavor in the eternal perspective in which it is seen by Christian faith. We need not share the apparent belief of much of the primitive church in the imminent visible return of Christ in order to perceive the profound truth in the New Testament writers' confident expectation of the final consummation of God's rule and the ultimate triumph of his purpose. The gospel proclaimed by the earliest Christian evangelists linked inseparably the action of God in creation, new creation, and final fulfillment. The church's ministry to today's world, threatened as it is by well-nigh total physical destruction, will be sadly incomplete if it omits reference to the accomplishment of God's ends in his everlasting kingdom.

II. Guidelines for a New Statement

As The Methodist Church or its Board of Missions undertakes to rethink the aim of mission, it should fulfill at least three conditions: (1) it should think in completely ecumenical terms; (2) it must proceed in clear awareness of the present social and cultural situation; and (3) it must take fully into account the contributions made to the understanding of the gospel by recent Biblical and theological investigations. The first of these requirements is here taken for granted without discussion, since it should by now be self-evident that the goals of the Christian mission far transcend the interests of The Methodist Church or any particular communion. The other two conditions may be briefly examined.

A. A Revolutionary World The Christian mission will fail

unless it confronts unflinchingly the revolutionary nature of contemporary society. We live not only in a period of unparalleled and breath-taking scientific development, but also in an era of unprecedentedly rapid social change, as hundreds of millions of people, seeking economic, political, intellectual, and personal freedom and dignity, are casting off old systems and customs and seeking new ways which promise greater opportunity.

On the one hand, this situation poses grave problems for the church, which has often been woefully handicapped by misunderstanding of the true meaning of the events churning around it, identification with an unjust *status quo*, indifference to the rightful aspirations of underprivileged people, or preoccupation with a dominantly otherworldly conception of the gospel. In any event the church today faces a cultural environment which to a startling degree regards it and its message with indifference, unbelief, or hostility. Much of the world is simply not listening to what the church says or observing with any real interest or approval of what it does. Materialistic humanism is in the saddle in both East and West, with Christian standards openly opposed in one case and verbally honored while subtly rejected or ignored in the other.

On the other hand, a church true to the good news committed to it is singularly equipped for speaking effectively to our kind of world. As Latourette and Hogg have pointed out, the gospel itself is "revolutionary, and in a more thoroughgoing and constructive sense than is any competitor."³ It tells of a God who in the Word made flesh has identified himself with the entire range of man's earthly existence. It not only addresses itself to the social ills from which men suffer, but deals radically with the self-centeredness, the lovelessness, the guilt, and the anxiety which lie at the root of social injustice. It calls for drastic change in men's outward circumstances, but offers a still deeper transformation of persons themselves through the forgiving love

³ Kenneth Scott Latourette and William Richey Hogg, *Tomorrow Is Here* (New York: Friendship Press, 1948), p. 83.

and renewing power of God. The church must regain an awareness of the radical nature of its own gospel as both gift and demand. Simultaneously, it must be informed and completely realistic regarding the society in which God is already redemptively at work, and to which it is called to minister in his name.

B. Relevant Theological Emphases

Contemporary Protestant theology exhibits wide diversity and many differing interpretations. Issues occasioning sharp disagreement include the question whether priority belongs to the objective givenness of the revelation of God or to man's understanding of existence; the role of reason in revelation; the relation of faith and history, especially that between the Christ of faith and the historical Jesus; the problem of hermeneutical method; the relation between law and gospel; the nature and extent of Christian ethical and social responsibility; and the meaning of eschatological existence. Nevertheless, readily discernible are many broad areas of agreement, many of which are directly relevant to the nature and purpose of Christian missionary endeavor. Some major aspects of this consensus may now be indicated.

1. The definitive basis of man's knowledge of God and salvation is God's self-revelation recorded in and mediated by the Scriptures. The Biblical writings are therefore authoritative in matters of faith. Basically, however, revelation consists in the acts of God by which he discloses himself to men for the purpose of reconciling them to himself. It involves primarily divine-human encounter, not the impartation of eternal truths or propositions.

2. Revelation culminates in the events centering in the coming of Jesus Christ and the continuing witness of the Holy Spirit to his saving power. Therefore, Jesus Christ is central for both Christian faith and Christian theology. The church is commissioned to proclaim his lordship over all of life—a lordship which was demonstrated in his resurrection and will be consummated in his final victory.

3. The depth of man's sinfulness

and alienation from God is seen much more realistically than in the first decades of the twentieth century, though this insight is now balanced by renewed recognition of the positive possibilities opened to man by divine grace. Created by God for sonship with him, man has rebelled, trusting himself instead of God, yet he is "destined for Christ" (Wingren) and enabled through God's reconciling action to become a new creation. Karl Barth still asserts the radical corruption of man, but insists that in the light of the Incarnation even sinful man is the being whom God wills to be his covenant-partner; the essential truth about the nature of man is found in Jesus Christ.

4. Salvation is accomplished by divine grace appropriated through faith, not by human works, whether legal, ceremonial, or ethical. Barthians and confessional Lutherans emphasize the sovereignty of the God whose grace calls forth faith. Though Christian existentialists like Bultmann say little of grace *per se*, they stress the absence of all guarantees in saving faith and man's complete dependence for redemption on the God who is not at his disposal and whose favor he cannot deserve or earn. Roman Catholics like Rahner and Congar agree that ultimately man depends utterly on God for salvation. "The grace of God is everything" (Rahner).

5. Some of the main emphases of Protestant existentialists find wide acceptance today. Most theologians include in the province of theology consideration of the objective nature and activity of God himself and the enduring reality of human nature, and are unwilling to limit theological concern to the existential relation of man and God and the faith-events which lead to authentic human existence. However, there is widespread agreement that our fullest knowledge of God is related to the salvation-event in man, that newness of life must be personally or existentially experienced, and that genuine faith comes to focus in the concrete decisions and committed actions of the whole person.

6. The gospel which theology seeks to interpret is kerygmatic in nature; it is proclamation, preaching, or witness addressed to

men for the purpose of calling forth their response. This makes it imperative that careful attention be given to problems of communicating the good news, hence, to the hermeneutical question. Which method should we employ in interpreting the Biblical texts which make known the Word of God to men? What principles should guide our exposition? On what basis may we best understand and communicate to others the Biblical message which we are commissioned to proclaim? What language shall we employ? Questions like these elicit sharply divergent answers, but they are being seriously asked by most theologians today, concerned as they are to reach persons where they actually are and lead them to understanding and commitment.

7. Essential to both the propagation of the gospel and growth in the Christian life is the faithful community, the church. At the very time when the institutionalism of the church is being most incisively criticized, the divine foundation and the human necessity of the redemptive community is most emphatically asserted. Widely different views are held regarding the precise nature of the church and its ministry and sacraments, but Protestants, Catholics, and Orthodox agree in affirming its indispensability as the distinctive instrument of God's reconciling activity among men. It is the worshiping, witnessing, teaching, serving fellowship of those who have responded affirmatively to God's redemptive love disclosed in Jesus Christ, and who in the power of his Holy Spirit are called to manifest that love and actualize his kingdom.

8. Truly Christian faith involves responsible participation in the life of society and identification with men as they confront the problem of daily existence. In the light of the Incarnation, for example, Barth sees humanity as basically fellow-humanity, and calls on Christians to recognize their solidarity with all men. His view is representative of an almost universal assertion by theologians today of the ethical and social responsibility of individual Christians and the church. On all sides are heard pleas for a faith that is relevant to concrete human need, for "worldly Christianity,"

and for the "secularization" of the gospel. Those who worship the God who in redemptive love has taken on himself the sin, suffering, and hurt of the world are driven to similar involvement. According to Nissiotis, eucharistic worship by its very nature thrusts believers out into the world in witness and service; *diakonia* is "the Eucharist *incognito*." This recognition of the secular significance of Christian faith is closely related to a new emphasis on the distinctive ministry or apostolate of the laity, who are the church in the world.

9. Christian theology today is emphatic in declaring the uniqueness of the Christ-event and the salvation which it makes possible. What God has done in Jesus Christ to heal the broken relation between himself and men he has done nowhere else before or since. All men are therefore summoned to accept in trust and obedience the gifts of forgiveness, reconciliation, and renewal of life made available through Jesus Christ. Although sharing this fundamental conviction, theologians take different positions with regard to non-Christian religions. These range all the way from the assertion of a sharp disjunction between religion and faith to the recognition of genuinely Christian elements in the commitment of non-Christians, including even atheists, to causes like justice, truth, brotherhood, and peace which assume absolute value and involve ends which are in fact supernatural. Yet there is widespread recognition, explicit or implicit, that the Holy Spirit is actively seeking to bring all men to his light and truth, and that he is present in their highest strivings whether they are aware of him or not. Methodists will note here a view closely akin to Wesley's doctrine of prevenient grace.

10. Present-day theology is marked by an increasing recognition that the life of the Christian and the church, indeed that of the world as a whole, must be seen in eschatological perspective. Aside from the belief of extreme conservatives in the visible, tangible second coming of Christ, two main views are held. Many theologians interpret the New Testament promise of the return of Christ to mean

the event which will bring the entire temporal process to its ultimate goal, the final consummation of God's purpose to redeem his creation. In contrast, Christian existentialists interpret the end not chronologically, as the terminus of historical time, but qualitatively, as the end of the worldliness of man. The eschatological event is the end of the old world of the individual believer and his entrance into a new and transformed life, in which concern for self and security is replaced by faith working through love. Obviously this second interpretation may be held also by those who take the first position, although the first is rejected by those who hold the second. However, both stress the eschatological dimension of faith as they interpret it, and both see the church as an eschatological community commissioned to call men to repentance and a new existence which faces God's future in faith.

III. A New Look at the Aims of Mission

The New Testament passages cited in Section I above and the theological emphases summarized in Section II, seen in relation to the revolutionary nature of our world, may provide the raw materials for a statement of aims appropriate to The Methodist Church today. If we reexamine these materials with particular reference to the purpose of Christian missionary endeavor, we find in them the following directives.

In the New Testament passages the followers of Christ are:

- (1) sent to carry forward among men the ministry committed to the crucified and risen Lord himself;
- (2) commissioned to bear witness to Jesus Christ in places near and far throughout the world;
- (3) sent forth to win disciples in all nations and to baptize them in the name of the triune God;
- (4) chosen as the new people of God, and in this capacity called to proclaim his redemptive acts and carry on in his behalf the ministry or ambassadorship of reconciliation;
- (5) charged with instructing new

disciples to observe the teachings of Jesus;

(6) counseled to preach the good news of God's kingdom in the expectation that the end of history will disclose the victory of God in judgment and glory; and

(7) assured that in all their efforts they will be empowered by the Holy Spirit.

Implicit or explicit in the major emphases of contemporary theology are the following convictions concerning the aims of Christian mission. The church is:

(1) responsible for interpreting and communicating the gospel in terms understandable and relevant to men faced by the agonizing problems of life in today's world;

(2) called to witness to men everywhere the unique acts by which God in Jesus Christ, as recorded in the Scriptures, has revealed himself in suffering love to sinful men in order to restore their broken relationship with him and each other;

(3) commissioned to call on men to accept in the personal decision of faith God's gracious gift of forgiveness and newness of life in sonship to him;

(4) responsible for leading those who respond affirmatively to full involvement in the worship, witness, and service of the redemptive community which is the body of Christ, and to a ministry of ethical and social responsibility in the world; and

(5) charged to live, and to call others so to do, in the acknowledgement of the lordship of Christ and in confident expectation of the ultimate fulfillment of God's purpose in his eternal kingdom.

IV. A Suggested Statement

Since contemporary theologians endeavor to interpret the Biblical message in relation to the world of today, the extent of the similarity in the two summaries is no occasion for surprise. By synthesizing them, eliminating repetitions and preserving the distinctive emphases of each, we should be able to draft a statement of aims which is faithful to both the New Testament witness and the insights of present-day Christian thought. The follow-

The aims of Christian mission are:

(2) to evoke in men the personal response of repentance and faith through which by God's grace they may find newness of life in righteous, loving relationships with God and their fellow men of all nations, tongues, and races;

tive community, the church, and its ministry of reconciliation in the world; and

(4) to move men to live in awareness of the presence and life-giving power of God's Holy Spirit, in acknowledgment of his rule over earthly history, and in confident expectation of the ultimate consummation of his purpose.

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